

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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BIRDS IN THE KULU VALLEY

R. McL. Cameron

Having a great affection for India, I took the opportunity to visit her again on my way to England this year. The air-line fare allows through passengers to stop off and do an internal trip at no extra cost, so I went up to the fabulous Kulu Valley, about 100 miles north of Simla, for a week in May to see what it had to offer in the way of birds (and fish).

What wonderful scenery and what a wealth of bird-life! I knew just enough not to be entirely mystified, and yet saw much that was entirely new to me.

One morning, on an early morning walk round the outskirts of Manali I had the great good fortune to meet Kumar Shri Lavkumar, whose name I knew well through the Newsletter. Seeing me loafing about with field-glasses, and sensing a few birdwatcher, he came up and introduced himself and offered me a cup of tea from his camp. After this we met on several occasions, and his unassuming advice and those little practical hints, so valuable to the newcomer and yet so seldom put into books, were both a great help and a pleasure to me. He made me promise to write to the Newsletter, so here is my contribution.

The Kulu Valley at Manali is about 7000 ft elevation, with the Beas river already fairly large and flowing swiftly through a valley of orchards, grain crops and paddy fields, with streams joining it at frequent intervals from minor valleys on either side. The sides of the main valley rise steeply and are covered mainly with fir trees in different strata, though there are other trees as well such as

walnut and maple, until they emerge above the tree-line to meet the snow-covered mountain tops. This all represents quite a variety of habitat. There was the bare mountain-side above which were Golden Eagles, Himalayan Griffon Vultures, Lammergeiers and Snow Pigeons in the air, and on the ground Grandaloes, Mountain Finch and Rosebreasted Pipit. The forested hillsides seemed rather empty but there were Tree-Creepers, Pied Woodpeckers and Green Woodpeckers. Near the streams and main river Redstarts were common, both Plumbeous and Whiteheaded, and so were Himalayan Whistling Thrushes and Dippers (Brown). Twice I saw a Little Forktail and also a pair of large grey-looking Kingfishers (Himalayan Pied ?). It was in the cultivated part of the valley that the real wealth of birdlife was seen. Blue Magpies with their absurdly long tails were feeding on the ripe cherries that loaded the trees. Five different Flycatchers -- Paradise, Sooty, Slatey Blue, Whitebrowed Blue, and Greyheaded; four tits -- Greenbacked, Grey, Simla Black, and the beautiful little Redheaded Tit. Up in the trees were Large Minivets, Redbacked Shrike, Rufous Turtle Doves, Cuckoos, Golden Orioles, Black Bulbuls, Tree-pies and Drongos. On bushes were Collared Bush-Chat, Cinnamon Tree-Sparrow, Whitecheeked Bulbul, Dark Grey Bush-Chat, Common and Brahminy myna. That last was an ' off-beat ' one, or rather a pair, but confirmed by Mr Lavkumar. On the ground were wagtails -- White, Grey and Grey-headed, Hoopoe and Meadow Bunting. In the undergrowth were Bluechats, Blackbird and Streaked Laughing Thrush. Round the houses and in the air were, of course the common House Sparrows and Crows, Swifts, Martins and Pariah Kite. Occasionally seen higher up were Spinetail, Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel, Carrion Crow, and, ratherto my surprise, a pair of Blacknecked Storks.

There were many others that I could only guess at; glimpses of warblers among the leaves, and various bird-calls heard in the tops of trees, but all too soon it was time to go, though with a determination to return before long.

More and more holiday-makers are going into the hills, and I hope that at least some of them will appreciate the wonderful variety of bird-life around them. That scenery enhanced by all those birds! and the airy attractions of modern life are shown up for the worthless things they are.

THE BROWN SHRIKE IN BHILAI

V. G. Kartha

I actually noticed this bird for the first time in October, 1968, attracted by its harsh piercing call. A frantic thumbing through of the ' Bible ' (I hope Dr Salim Ali won't mind the epithet; I do consider his Book of Indian Birds a ' Bible ') was not fruitful. The only drawing that looked like it was that of the Wood Shrike, but the ' symptoms ' did not tally. I could not make a reasonable diagnosis

until much later when I borrowed Whistler from the only other bird-watching soul I know of in Bhilai. By that time I had also acquired a pair of binoculars (second-hand) and this brought my feathered friend right up close in full cinemascope and technicolor.

In due course, I found plenty of the same birds around Bhilai, always single and seemingly interspersed at regular intervals. Each appeared to have staked out its domain and could always be found within that area. The one I have been continually watching seems to have commandeered the area in front of my house. It seems to be the only brown shrike around, at least not for another half a kilometre. I have not been able to clearly pin down the boundaries of its overlordship, but I have noticed its preference for a few small trees near my front gate where it spends practically the whole day. These trees border the road, and beyond them is an open grassy ground.

I saw the bird throughout last winter and spring, and late into April. I wish I could have recorded the last date before it disappeared to its northern winter resort. Salim Ali says in The Birds of Kerala that the last recorded date is 27 April. It is supposed to arrive in late August. This year, I was on the look-out since late August, but didn't notice it until 22 September, when it announced itself on one of the trees. I can't say whether it is the same tenant of last year though it does sound wonderful telling the children. It might be that the brown shrikes started arriving earlier, but the area in front of my house was the last choice left to the late comers. I have been more imaginative than watchful to be sure that this one wasn't a late-comer after all. But soon after 22 September I started seeing them all over Bhilai. I wonder how they migrate -- in one big batch or in waves. This year's tenant too appears to treat the same trees with the ground around them as a private hunting preserve.

The size of the bird is about that of the bulbul. The top of head, neck and back is mouse-brown. The eye-mask is black with a prominent white eye-brow. I have not noticed any white forehead as described by Salim Ali. The underportions: chin, throat and belly are a dirty white and the chest is faintly barred. The flanks are slightly greyish. The rump and tail are more rust coloured than brown. The tail is only slightly shorter than the trunk, but there are no pale tips to the feathers. The upper mandible is hooked and horny while the lower one is yellowish at the root. The legs look black below the knees.

Both Whistler and Salim Ali describe the call of the brown shrike as chr-r-r-ri. But I think a better way to put it would be chr-chr-chr. The syllable is repeated in a fast staccato fashion. The only man-made sound that I can think of in comparison (it is not much of a comparison, anyway) is that made by the plastic toy with a bit of sand inside -- a baby's distractor -- when shaken quite fast. The call is quite characteristic and easily distinguishable from that of other shrikes.

Salim Ali describes the brown shrike as perhaps more crepuscular, as it can be seen hunting about well after dusk. I have seen it 'working' practically all day except in mid afternoon, say from 11.30 a.m.

to 3.00 p.m. However, it reveals its vocal capabilities only in the early morning and at dusk, giving more so the impression of being crepuscular. It is more or less quiet throughout the day, sitting most of the time on the lowermost branches of trees, or on fences, just about $1\frac{1}{2}$ metres above the ground. It is usually so motionless that it is difficult to detect. The occasional movement it permits itself is that of the head which swivels this way and that keeping a sharp look-out for 'jay-walking' insects and worms. As you gaze at it through the field glasses noting down its beauty spots, it takes off so suddenly that you blink in your eye-pieces. It flies to the ground, makes a pin-point landing, picks up the insect, worm or caterpillar, and flies back to the same or an adjacent outpost. The flight is direct with a quick beating of the wings. Most often it swallows the prey before it gets back to its perch -- probably in flight itself. Rarely does it sit on the ground for more than a second or two in daytime. As dusk approaches, it pauses longer (because of failing light?). As it gets darker still, it even sometimes makes short sprints along the ground like a babbler. When on the ground, it holds its tail slightly elevated. I have never heard it calling from anywhere close to the ground. It is usually from high up among the leaves or from overhead electric wires. It opens its mouth wide and the whole body and tail vibrates with the effort.

Altogether, the brown shrike is an interesting bird though not so colourful as the other shrikes. But then, it is more often heard than seen.

BIRDS OF MUSSOORIE

Sudhir Vyas

The first bird which intrudes upon your peace in Mussoorie is not the chirpy sparrow, not the garrulous crow, but that rough and ready champion in song, the Himalayan Whistling Thrush. It was everywhere -- in the woods, on the open hillsides, even in the bazaar. Its pleasant song was a regular feature of both day and night. But apart from this I saw very few thrushes. I saw the Blueheaded and Chestnut-bellied rock thrushes occasionally. The Greywinged Blackbird was often heard singing, but being shy, was rarely seen. During the last week of our stay, however, a male took up quarters in our garden and delighted us with his song.

An amusing incident took place one day, when I descended into the thorny undergrowth on hearing what sounded like a puppy. But no puppy was to be found. Instead, three Blue magpies fluttered off from a bush. I gained a wise experience -- always test for Blue magpies before diving after unfamiliar noises -- and paid for it by quite a few scratches. Redbilled Blue magpies were, incidentally, very common. A party of nearly 20 frequented the Municipal Gardens. On the contrary I never saw the Yellowbilled species.

My exhilaration knew no bounds when I saw a Sirkeer Cuckoo at 6500

feet. It declined considerably however on reading in Whistler that they are often found up to ' 6000 ft and even occasionally higher. ' It was much less rufous in colour than the ones I saw at Poona. Indian, Common, and Himalayan cuckoos were often heard. I once heard the ' Brainfever ' of a Hawk-cuckoo but I could not find it.

A lovely place for birds is the Kamptee Road. Here I once saw a Himalayan Barred Owl feeding its brood of three. I once heard the Himalayan Scops Owl's double whistle at night but I could not find it. On another occasion, I saw a nightjar fluttering along at dusk but it was silent and could not be identified. Kokla Green pigeons were common along the Kamptee Road and they often fed on berry-bushes close to the ground, thus providing an unobstructed view of themselves. They looked beautiful with their orange breasts and maroon backs. Kaleej pheasants too were fairly common here.

A great disappointment was the paucity of hawks in Mussoorie. The Kestrel was the commonest falcon and a pair had a nest on a high ledge on Gun Hill. A small falcon was seen twice in forest, and I think it was a hobby. (On another occasion I saw a large peregrine-like falcon, but it had pale underparts. What could an Eastern Peregrine be doing here in June? I saw a shikra once but no eagles at all! There was a refuse dump in Mussoorie where large numbers of Scavenger Vultures, large Indian Kites and a Lammergeier or two fed on rubbish. A number of Grey Drongos also frequented this place. Could it be due to the flies attracted to the rotting refuse?

The Redwinged Shrike-babbler was much commoner than what I had expected. I once saw a family party on the 16th of June with two young. They often associated with Tree-pies, Drongos and Dark Grey Cuckoo-Shrikes. I also saw once what I think was a female Maroon Oriole.

A Hoopoe and a huge colony of House Swifts had nests on the remains of the ' Standard Skating rink ' on the Mall which burnt down in 1968 and by the courtesy of the municipality is still standing. I hope it survives long enough for the swifts to raise their young. Blyth's Whiterumped Swifts arrived in some numbers about the middle of June. A little later Whitethroated Spinetails and Alpine Swifts also made their appearance. Shortbilled Minivets had finished breeding by June and could be seen in family parties.

The Great Himalayan Barbet was common in the jungles as were the Scalybellied and Blacknaped Green woodpeckers and the Brownfronted Pied Woodpecker. The Himalayan Pied Woodpecker was rare and an interesting discovery was the Lesser Yellownaped Woodpecker.

I must admit, however, that there were quite a few disappointments too. From books I had formed the impression that the hills would be teeming with laughing thrushes. What a shock I received to see only two species -- the Streaked and the Whitethroated. Even the latter was by no means common. A few rather pale Redrumped swallows which nested under bridges and some seedy looking House-martins were the only swallows I saw. There was hardly a Tree-warbler in the area. I only saw one -- a plain brown and buff one with no wing bars and a pinkish beak which refused to utter a sound and could not be identified. I left it in disgust. The Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warbler was, how-

ever overwhelmingly abundant. I saw only two Yellowbacked sunbirds and very few Firebreasted flowerpeckers and Black bulbuls. Neither did I see any Hill Partridges. The Black Partridge however was common and the hills resounded with their calls in the morning. Another relief was the predominance of the quiet little Cinnamon Sparrow over the House Sparrow. Crows (with very harsh voices) were also not common.

In spite of this it was a very enjoyable outing and I saw over a hundred species of birds in one and half months. I was quite disappointed to return to the sweltering heat and humidity of Lucknow.

AT BRAHMINY MYNA'S NEST

T. Koneri Rao

A pair of Brahminy Mynas had their nest in a crevice in a wall. The crevice was at 5½ feet from the ground. It was dark inside the nest chamber, but when the sun was well up I could see in the dim light (inside the chamber) two young mynas begging for food. They were blind. Their heads were shivering and their yellow gapes were pointing to the roof. Both the parent mynas used to feed till 5.45-6 p.m. When the offspring were very young the parents fed them by regurgitation and they took nearly a minute and a half to feed by this method for every feed. When the sun was getting hotter, the parents brought green leaves now and then. Once it brought such a green leaf to be placed inside the nest but it dropped it on the floor. It was discovered to be a fresh neem leaf. I remember to have read that Common Mynas bring neem leaves (known for their germicidal property) to nest to protect the eggs and young ones from germs and fungi. I have seen on occasions Common mynas bringing neem as well as other green leaves to the nest. The Brahminy mynas also were not partial to neem leaves. They once brought a drum-stick tree leaf. I believe the intention of placing green leaves inside the nest is to check the increasing temperature inside the nest chamber. I think when the chicks were quite grown up they stopped bringing green leaves.

When the young mynas had grown up the parents brought bunches of protesting green worms. As the passage to the nest was narrow, the parents while carrying food to the young were sometimes stuck up at the entrance. They immediately withdrew their heads on such occasions and swallowed the insects themselves. Now and then they removed the faecal sacs and dropped them at a distance of 20 yards or so. Sometimes they were swallowed at the nest. Once I was shocked to see through my telephoto lens (at a close range) a parent emerging out of the nest with a dead chick dangling in its beak.

One of the parents, probably the female, spent the night inside the nest. When the young mynas had grown up it roosted elsewhere. This, I believe, was due to lack of space inside the nest.

What fascinated me the most at the nest was the sudden appearance of other birds near the myna's nest. A female Black Robin was one such visitor. I was inside the 'hide' then. The robin was curious to know what the mynas were doing there. I swivelled my camera a little to my left and photographed the robin which gazed at the 'hide' with its black beady eyes. It detected my presence and flew off in a flash. The second visitor was a Large Pied Wagtail. It sat on top of the wall and vigorously wagged its tail. It was not aware of my presence till I started focussing my camera. When it noticed the slight movement it disappeared. Once a brahmyni kite flew over my head. The parents squeaked and the little mynas remained in silence for a minute.

BIRDS AROUND BOMBAY

D. A. Stairmand

On the edge of a clearing in the forest at Khandala on 21st December I was very fortunate to see a pair of Malabar Trogons. Besides the underparts of the male -- described by Dr Salim Ali in Indian Hill Birds as 'brilliant crimson pink' the thing that struck me most was the broad square cut tail. This was the first time I had seen Harpactes fasciatus and it was a wonderful thrill and I only wish they had tarried at least a little longer on the branches of the tree on which I saw them for less than one minute before they flew away.

Also at Khandala on 21st December I was drawn to a Wild Fig -- in ripe fruit -- by a monotonous one-note rather high pitched call of a bird. This turned out to be a young Goldfronted Chloropsis (Chloropsis aurifrons) being fed by an adult bird, which was a male. The adult male was resplendent in green, golden, purple and black whereas the immature bird was all green except for traces of the beginnings of dark feathers on the throat. The adult was feeding the young bird on insects gathered from the undersides of leaves. I watched the young bird being fed for about half-an-hour and only towards the end of this session did I see the young bird collecting insects for itself from under the leaves. The young bird's call was almost constant and it crouched and 'shivered' to be fed. The adult bird uttered its pleasant familiar call quite often. It would appear that this bird had bred unusually late as the main nesting period is May to August.

On 2nd October I saw Kashmir Rollers (Coracias garrulus semenowi) between Thana and Taloja on the Bombay-Poona Road and these are extremely attractive birds with their blue-black flight feathers and wholly light blue underparts. By 10/x these birds had been replaced in the same area by the Indian Roller (C. benghalensis).

At Panvel on 21st December there were Bank Mynas (Acridotheres ginginianus) running around amongst buffaloes' feet on squalchy ground. I had not noticed them there before.

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Should I report a Spotbill, Garganey Teal and Common Snipe at Vihar in early December? The Spotbill's metallic green wing-bar, bright orange-red legs, yellow tipped dark bill with orange spot at the base showed up excellently as the bird took off and flew low over the lake.

A party of c. 20 Blacktailed Godwits (Limosa limosa) have been on the Mahim Creek for at least three weeks. When I first saw them on 6th December they formed a mixed party with about 10 Bartailed Godwits (Limosa lapponica) and about 150 Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus). The Stilts are also still there but I have not seen the Bartailed Godwits recently. When together, I found it easy to distinguish the two different Godwits apart. On the mud the longer leggedness of the Blacktailed Godwit was apparent and when in flight the black-ended tail showed up prominently.

Finally, to end on, not a bird, but a Parking Deer seen running through lightly wooded country in Borivli National Park on 13th December, then across the road about 30 yards in front of my car (which I'd stopped) to the wooded country, bordering Vihar Lake. This was at the hairpin bend before the Deer Pen turning on the right of the road.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Government of India, Ministry of Food & Agriculture, in a recent circular draws attention to the note submitted by Shri K. S. Dharmakumarsinhji regarding the study of birds in relation to their impact on agriculture. The note reads as follows:

'Most insectivorous birds are useful to man and the majority of the birds are also considered beneficial. However, some of the graminivorous birds and those that eat fruits are considered harmful. The House Sparrow which eats seeds and grains and has been considered by some as harmful, feeds its young on an insectivorous diet and similarly the Weaver birds. To what extent are such birds harmful, to man's interest should be studied. It is a general belief that Parakeets are harmful to fruit crops and grain crops and the agriculturist has to drive these birds away during the crop season. What exactly useful part do such birds play in their life cycle should be studied. Should these birds be controlled or allowed to increase. House pigeons for the above reasons should be studied the year round in rural areas and around cities. In some States birds of prey are on the vermin list and are permitted to be killed without licence. Most birds of prey are useful and should be studied for the role they play in nature. Similarly crows etc. '

* * * *

The Xth General Assembly and the XIth Technical Meeting of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

was held in New Delhi from 24th November to 1st December 1969. A reference to this was made in a previous issue of the Newsletter and some extracts from the papers presented were given. A more detailed report of the Assembly will be given in a later issue. However, it must be acknowledged without delay that the Assembly was very well organized for which much credit is due to the Government of India, and the discussions were on a sufficiently practical plain to sustain the hope that the recommendations will be put into effect.

CORRESPONDENCE

Colour plates in The Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan

In the first volume of the Handbook there are two colour pictures of the Shahin Falcon (Falco p. peregrinator). The first picture is in Plate 12, No. 3 and the second in Plate 13, No. 2. I want to know if there are two types of Shahin Falcons or the two pictures of the same bird were printed by mistake.

Kameshwar Pd Singh
A.N.S. College, Barh, Bihar

[Not a mistake. Coloured plates from various regional works published earlier and having a bearing on the present Handbook volumes are used in these volumes for reasons of economy and keeping its cost down. This has led to duplication of illustrations of some of the species dealt with. -- Ed.]

BIRDS AND BATS

I do not know whether you would consider this letter suitable for the Newsletter, but as I feel batwatching and birdwatching are allied hobbies, one starting where the other leaves off, I am sending it to you anyway.

For the past few months a smallish bat has taken to visiting me at night to make its meals while hanging from the underside of the two cane bottomed chairs in my room. The meals usually consist of half a dozen or so moths, whose wings I find under the chairs every morning. From the many fleeting glimpses I have had of the animal's brownish yellow rump as it glides out through the window bars, I think it is probably a Common Yellow Bat (Scotophilus heathi). I have got rather sentimental about the little animal which explains why I am sleeping in the December cold with my door and windows open.

About a week back I read (C. Ingram, In Search of Birds) that the European Barn Owl (Tyto alba) often raids sparrow roosts (no doubt they they do the same in this country) after dark. Looking up at the two sparrows which spend their nights on top of the fan, I couldn't help thinking that they at least were safe from such a fate. I was soon to be proved wrong.

Last night I was rudely awakened at 3.15 a.m. by a sharp cheenk-cheep-cheep bordering on a scream. When I had got over my initial fright, I heard a flapping sound of something flying in my room and decided that one of the sparrows must have been caught by a bat. On switching on the light there was no doubt about the identity of the predator. The huge lyre shaped ears sticking out in front of the head and the approximate 25 cm wing span, could only be that of the Indian False Vampire (Megaderma lyra). I have handled specimens of this bat before. They have a uniformly dark greyish brown fur and have a very ugly creased and pug-nosed face. The fur teems with small red parasites which are half the size of a pin-head.

The bat flew out of the door almost immediately, and as it did not carry anything with it I looked for the sparrow. I found her lying dead, limp and still warm between a trunk and the wall. The back of the skull had been bitten through just where it joined the neck and there was no bleeding or signs of struggle. Death must have been instantaneous.

Debashis Ray

Jamalpur Gymkhana, Jamalpur

21 December 1969

First sighting of some of our winter visitors

We saw a party of Large Green Bee-eaters in the evening of the 1st of August for the first time in the season. We were aware of the presence of Common Swallows on the 17th September, although they must have begun arriving a few days earlier.

We sighted the first few Common Green Bee-eaters on the 6th October.

The first Yellowbrowed Warbler of the season was seen by us on the morning of the 29th September.

The Brown Shrike first came to our notice on the 2nd of October.

We saw the first Booted Warbler on the 3rd November which was just the right time for the bird to arrive.

On the 30th of September we recorded our first Grey Wagtail of the season.

V. Ravi

President, Nature Study Club

Guntur, 19 Dec. 1969

Zafar Futehally

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THE HILLS

K.S. Lavkumar

A memorable summer - or rather a part of it is coming to a close and in a couple of days I will be following this letter down to the plains and the heat. It is, however, heartening to learn from letters received from Bombay and Rajkot that both places have had rain so this augurs an early monsoon, a season I always looked forward to in the plains, as do everyone else, but in the "Hills" this brings an end to "The Season" for tourists and climbers.

This is after many years that I have been among high mountains as late as this and so I was able to see the transformation of bleak snow-clad slopes above the tree line into lush green meadows. The change takes place within a fortnight and the birch forests which even in the first week of July are bare, white trunks and branches only with a flush of green about them, are now deep, shady green with surprisingly luxuriant foliage; the effect is startling. I am of course used to such rapid change from the bare to the foliated in our mimosas and accacias with the onset of the rains, but those trees have small, delicate leaves suggesting of frugality expected of life where conditions are difficult. But these birches are quite flagrantly opulent in their exuberance during their short summer growth, but then I suppose they do

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deserve a period of vegetative joy, considering the long severe cold they survive through. Among the birches and a little above them are thickets of stunt Rhododendron campanulatum. Before summer sets in at their altitude, they put forth an amazing display of lilac blooms which belie the rigours of their environments in April and May.

Following the melting of the snow, and at times even before winter's cold grip has entirely gone, vegetative life begins stirring in the thawing, soddy earth below. Most of the plants send out flower spikes well before their leaves unfurl to bask in the warm summer sun and be bathed by the soft summer rain. Among these early flowers, various species of Primula are the most charming and prolific.

You may at this stage well raise your eyebrows and mutter - "Why all this to the Editor of a Newsletter for Birdwatchers?" But before reaching for your red pencil to scratch an imperious "Not suitable for this publication", I must hasten to assure you that this letter is about birds. How so indeed! May I ask in return, "Why do plants put out flowers?" Quite obviously for the important function of pollination, which for such gay flowers as of the Rhododendrons and such pretty and scented ones as of the Primula is done by insects. So, early as the snow conditions may suggest, there must be ample insect life around among the high mountains, and there indeed is. So "soft-bills" or insectivorous birds can live easily among the hostile environments. Their song is the triumphant time of life over harsh elemental nature. Blue-fronted Redstarts, White-capped Redstarts (along water courses), Hodgson's or Rose-breasted Pipits, Tickel's Willow, Warblers, Rufous-breasted Accentors, Whistling Thrushes, and Robin Accentors are active above treeline staking out territories and singing vigorously over the still frozen slopes. Among the "hard bills" or seed eaters, flocks of Brant's Mountain Finches, females of Rose Finches in flocks, scattered groups of Gold Finches are present. Monals, those lively representatives of the pheasant family, Chukors, and Snow Cocks are the interesting game birds ranging the high slopes. Monals are quite obviously greatly persecuted as is seen by the numbers of young hill dandies wearing their crest plumes during the innumerable "melas" which seem to follow in quick succession in the various parts of this lovely valley - the wonder is

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that monals are still quite common, though how long they will remain so a matter of speculation for now a new element is powerfully contributing to their destruction - the tourists! The glistening crown and crest make such attractive coat badges that they are selling at Rs.10/- to Rs.13/- each !! What chance has the monal then, its flesh eaten and a sum available to cover costs? Of course the high country they inhabit will give some measure of protection but during winter the snow forces them down to the level of human habitation and hunger makes them a bit reckless, thus exposing them to danger. The Chukor deserves to be killed really, so pompously stupid is the male indeed; he is fat - even my mouth watered - he climbs a very large and most prominent rock, and then sends forth a rasping challenge to the world of Chukors and of humans. Snowcocks are less vulnerable as they live very high and are not easy to see unless flushed when they take to wing flying along the slopes; a panting nimrod if he drops one, well deserves his prize. Unlike the monal, Ram-Chukor as this bird is known to the hillmen, is not resplendent, nor is he pompously declamatory like the Chukor and so he lives safely often as not going completely unnoticed - such is the virtue of prudence and humility.

The two species of Choughs, the Carrion Crow, the Bearded Vulture and the Griffon almost complete a normal list of birds one meets in March among the birches and the rhododendrons, but not quite, for a heavy fall of snow may compel flocks of Grandala - those starling sized birds down from their high altitude homes, and small parties of Himalayan Cole Tits. Very small birds and very active birds, will be met, busily feeding among bushes and probing into birch-bark crevices, often hanging head down. Brown Dippers are at home along the icy waters and early as the season may seem to have already young in nest!

Snow Pigeons are unmistakable and flocks of varying sizes will be invariably in sight.

The conifers lower down are inhabited by many very small birds Crested Black Tits. Himalayan Gold Crests, a couple of species of Willow Warblers - Himalayan Nutcrackers with very rasping calls, Pied Woodpeckers, Tree Creepers, Black and Yellow Grosbeaks with rather musical calls, Blackbirds and Whistling Thrushes. Both the latter sing at dawn and dusk, perched atop some tall conifer. Their songs are almost

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identical, though the Whistling Thrush has a weaker performance by far. I can never accept as right the presence of Short-billed Minivets among coniferous forests, so bright and tropical is the red of the males and gay the yellow and grey of the females, but they are there, flowing among the somber greens. Of course these belong more to the slightly lower forest zone as do the noisy, but cheerful Black Bulbuls, the Hoopoes, the Grey Drongos, the Blue Chats, the Himalayan Greenfinches, the White-browed Blue Flycatchers and the like. A very typical bird of the high conifers is the little nondescript sooty Flycatcher and what I think, but have yet to make absolutely sure, the yellow-browed Flycatcher Warbler. Scops Owls are frequently heard at night, their soft, questioning hoots are to my mind very soothing. I am always happy to have one calling when I cannot get sleep.

Cuckoos are quite the most wide ranging among any species and may be heard from near Katrain or still lower at 5,000' to the high treeless meadows above 12,000'. Not so common in these parts are the Indian and the Little Cuckoos. Both these latter remain at lower heights than the Cuckoo, as does the Himalayan Cuckoo.

At Bhuntar, about 3000' and some odd feet above sea level, I saw many common Swallows hawking first above the River Beas, in very high wind. Here also I saw Red rumped and Cliff Swallows; Alpine Swifts, White-breasted and Himalayan Pied Kingfishes and heard on a couple of occasions the Common Kingfisher. Golden Orioles, Paradise Flycatchers, Pied Bushchats, Collared Bushchats - the latter at higher altitudes than the former - common Mynahs, Black Bulbuls, Cinamon and House Sparrows, Grey Wagtails, and Blue Magpies compose the avian population of the Kulu Valley from Bhuntar to Manali. The Plumbeous Redstart is quite the commonest bird along the river.

I am always pleased to come across either of the forktails. The Spotted Forktail is an exotic creature, pied and with a very long forked tail, which makes it a suprising bird to meet on every occasion. It dwells along shaded streams in forest country which adds to its unexpected quality. It is so delicate and ephemeral in appearance that I am always desirous of seeing one over and over again. The Little Forktail is much more frequently met as it lives along broader streams, though the best place to come across a pair

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of these diminutive, sparrow sized birds is on large rocks with water sweeping down them where their flashing white outer tail feathers obliterate well against the glitter of sublight on falling water. The Little forktail is indeed Little but has a short, almost squared tail.

Normally in the mountains I live in Rest Houses, usually set away from human habitation or in tents in idyllic locations of my choice and so this year I had rather a surprise watching Indian Rosefinches, Grey Tits, Collared Bushchats, Rufous Turtle Doves, Blackbirds and many besides from the verandah of a village house, this being my first privilege to be a guest in one of the hill houses which to date I have admired as picturesque from a far, subjects for photography rather than abodes of men. They are rather practically designed and not a whit dirtier than any home in the plains. I am glad I have been able to have a more intimate intercourse with hill people. Cheerful and strong porters I know they indeed are, but in addition they are very intelligent and wide-awake, and they certainly do not smell more than any peasant in the low country, though they would be justified to smell far, far more if the plains people have any justification to smell at all - I was horrified to find that I often smelt more than they!

Unlike many others, I am happy to see the advantages of civilisation coming to these people, though I hope they will be able to use these more beneficially than have we and I pray that greater education and understanding will make them cherish and value the gifts of nature more than we have done in the plains.

Well, readers, if you have not already gone to sleep, then I may credit myself with a lucid pen and hope one day to write a bestseller and so earn millions to enable me to use a helicopter to peer into the eyrie of a Lammergeyer I saw high on an inaccessible crag in the Parbati valley - it was blowing and snowing at the time.

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THIS BIRD SANCTUARY IS AN OIL FIELD

(Reproduced from Scientific American, June 1969)

Communicated by M.A. Rau

Imagine a tiny green hump of an island in a Louisiana swamp. Its total area is less than five square miles.

Put two hundred houses on it and seven hundred people. Add one of America's largest rock salt mines, the TABASCO sauce factory and over a hundred oil wells. And what have you got? Overcrowding?

White opposite. Avery Island seems almost undiscovered. A place for the painter and the poet.

Its bird sanctuary sits in a 200-acre garden. Here you find irises from Siberia. Grapefruits from Cochin. Evergreens from Tibet, Bamboo from China. Lotuses from the Nile. Soap Trees from India. Daisies from Africa's Mountains of the Moon. And the world's most complete collection of camellias.

The sanctuary itself is a sight for any sore-eyed conservationist. It was established twenty-six years ago by Mr. Edward A. McIlhenny, a member of the family that has owned the island for 152 years. It had one purpose. To save the snowy egret from extinction.

Known as Bird City, the sanctuary started with only seven egrets. Now, over 100,000 nest around its man-made lake every year. To see these alabaster birds sharing their Eden with herons, ducks, coots, swans, cormorants, turtles, deer and alligators is almost a primeval experience. It seems to put the clock back to the beginning.

And wherever you wander on this peaceful island, you have to look hard to spot the oil wells. Many are hidden by grandfatherly oak trees bearded with Spanish moss. Others are screened by banks of azalea and rhododendron. To Jersey's affiliate, Humble Oil & Refining Company, this respect for environment is only right and proper.

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The oil industry provides Louisiana with one-third of its total revenue. But even this contribution would be a poor excuse for defiling beauty or disturbing wildlife.

Amen say the egrets.

BIRDWATCHERS FIELD CLUB OF ROORKEE (REPORT)

Joseph George

Field outings were organised fairly regularly during both these years. It was heartening to find a good number of children joining these outings. Films on wildlife were shown on four occasions, as usual to a full house.

Two special lectures were arranged. Dr. C.S. Gupta, Head of the Department of Zoology, Gurukul Kangri, described some interesting aspects of the life of ants. Mr. Eari Dang, Editor, CHEETAL, kept the members of the Club spellbound for over an hour with his account of Himalayan wildlife.

Dr. Joseph George was invited by the Refresher Courses Department of the Roorkee University to deliver two lectures on birds and birdwatching.

A list of the birds seen/heard and identified in Roorkee during the past eight years has been prepared. Copies can be had on request.

THE RING'S INDEX ORNITHOLOGORUM

The editor of the International Ornithological Bulletin THE RING proposes to publish an Index Ornithologorum embracing the professional and amateur ornithologist of the world.

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All entries should be in English and should be accompanied by one International Postal Reply Coupon for further correspondence. Closing date for all entries is June 30, 1970, but earlier arrival of entries would be appreciated. Do not delay - send your entry today.

The address is: The Editor, THE RING, Laboratory of Ornithology, Sienkiewicza 21, Wroclaw, Poland.

An entry/in English/ should contain the following information:

1. Surname
2. Names in full
3. Year of birth/optional/
4. Title
5. Positions held/including editorships, memberships, etc./
6. Principal interest in ornithology
7. Address
8. Authors of ornithological publications are requested to quote the most important of them.
9. Do you intend to purchase a copy of the INDEX if reasonably priced?
10. One I.P.R. Coupon is enclosed: yes - no

Date:

Signature

FIELD EXCURSION TO KARNALA AND WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

D.A. Stairmand

As Monday, 26th January, 1970 is a Public Holiday I shall be away from Bombay from 24th to 26th and regret I shall not be able to attend the Field Excursion to Karnala on the 25th January.

I would like to mention that I booked the Upper Rest House at Karnala for 2 days in mid-November and was so bitterly disappointed at what had happened since the place had been

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converted into a bird sanctuary that I left for the relative peace and quiet of the Goa Road after only one day. I had not re-visited Karnala again since until yesterday, when I was there from 7.30 a.m. to about 10.00 a.m. I chose an area some way up the path above the Rest Houses, which I knew well from visits last year before the area was popularised. Yesterday, I had good views of a fully adult Paradise Flycatcher and Black-naped Blue Flycatchers but such birds as the Golden Orioles, Black-headed Orioles, Goldfronted Chloropsis, Scarlet Minivets, Small Minivets and Mahratta Woodpeckers which had been so common about a year ago were not seen at all by me yesterday. By 9.00 a.m. the first 'busloads' of picnickers arrived shouting and yelling their way up the path to Karnala Fort, the same as had happened in mid-November. The area is not a patch on what it was a year ago. After my November visit I wrote a letter to a Mr. Yadav through whom I booked the Rest House but never received a reply. I realise I may be 'out of step' and wish you a successful outing.

Yesterday I saw 6 Avocets on a mud-bank just beyond Pen and there was an Openbill on Panvel Tank. This evening - and other evenings too - I've been watching the female Marsh Harrier at Vihar, which you mentioned in an article published in a Sunday newspaper. Also out at Vihar this evening was a King Vulture with Jungle Crows at a cattle carcass. On Saturday afternoon I was most happy to watchman adult male Bluethroat amongst the littoral at the far end of Vihar. The bird was not at all shy and I had an excellent view of him, stunning - or killing - a caterpillar, then give a delighted call, before swallowing the caterpillar. I shall be offering notes on these birds, plus one to two others, to the "Newsletter" and hope they may be of some use.

I enclose a cheque for Rs.25/- in favour of the World Wildlife Fund, and I would like to become a member of the Appeal. I do not appear to have received the 'membership form' referred to.

May I add that on 3 recent visits to Vihar I've heard no sound of tree-felling, for which I'm very grateful.

I hope that my unsolicited remarks about Karnala, etc. have not been out of place and apologies if they have.

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(Ed. Note: Mr. Stairmand had complained about tree-cutting in the Vihar area. The Editor took up the matter with Shri D.V. Khisty, Conservator of Forests, and it is good to know that action has been taken.

Regarding Karnala, I am afraid, there is always a choice between using a sanctuary for the enjoyment of people or leaving it to erode because of illicit wood-cutting. It is of course unfortunate that people make such a lot of noise when they come to a bird sanctuary.)

Zafar Futehally

Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOL. 10-NO. 3 - 1970 MARCH



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THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO (CLAMATOR JACOBINUS)

Jamal Ara

Just as the dawn of spring is heralded in northern lands by the call of the cuckoo, the onset of the monsoons in India, both Southwest and Northeast is announced by the Pied Crested Cuckoo. No sooner the rains break than groves, gardens, and open woodlands echo to its metallic piu..piu..pee-pee-piu, repeated twice. Often, only the monosyllable piu is heard. If the clouds part and the moon shines down on a rain-soaked earth, this bird will immediately greet the effulgent moonlight.

The Pied Crested Cuckoo is the most handsome of all the cuckoos, and is easily recognised. The upperparts of its plumage are black, while the lowerparts and the tips of its tail feathers are white, and prominent in flight. There is in each wing a conspicuous white roundish patch, and a black crest that does not lie down, but projects prettily from the back of the head. In flight, which is direct and laboured, the tail is kept pointing slightly upwards. But it is not necessary to set eyes on it to recognise it, only to hear it, is sufficient.

Like all cuckoos it is mostly arboreal, but unlike the other members of its family, it perches on the tops of low bushes — scrutinizing their foliage carefully for the insects on which it feeds. Beetles, tree-cricket, and hairy caterpillars form its diet. Often food is taken from the ground, where the bird hops about in search of insects.

The Pied Crested Cuckoo does not indulge in elaborate courtship — it is carried out on the wing with the tail partly spread out, the wings are beaten slowly and deliberately, as if practising some sort of delayed action flight. Of course, the courtship of no cuckoo is

conducted silently and the Pied Crested Cuckoo is no exception — it makes a noise all the time while courting. The bird is neither shy nor retiring, and one bird chasing another is a common sight. It is a parasitic bird, and wherever it is found, it lays according to the breeding season of the various babblers, in whose nests it deposits its eggs, from January to July. The eggs are a perfect imitation of those of the babblers — spotless sky blue, highly glossy, varying in length. In the Eastern Himalayas it has been found placing eggs in the nests of the Necklaced and Blackgorgeted Laughing thrushes, while in the Western Himalayas it is the Striated Laughing Thrush. The eggs of this cuckoo (northern) referred to in Hume's Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds (Vol. 3, pp. 388-391) were found in the plains of India or in the lower ranges of the Nilgiris or sub-Himalayas.

September is the month in which to look out for young Pied Crested Cuckoos. Those that I have seen in Daltongunj (Palamau) and Saitba (Singhbhum) differ considerably from the adult in appearance — being slaty grey above, the wing patch, and the tips of the outer tail feathers and lower portions, pale yellowish white. They were accompanied by young Jungle Babblers clamouring for food and flapping wings, just like the young babblers. But in Monghyr the young cuckoos were always seen unaccompanied by foster-brothers or sisters.

The Pied Crested Cuckoo is a restless bird, moving about a good deal, seldom staying more than a couple of days in one spot. The typical race is resident and occurs in Ceylon, South India north of the Coromandel Coast, and the southern Bombay Presidency, as far north as Karwar on the west and Madras on the east (Stuart Baker). The rest of India and Burma is inhabited by the larger form (serratus) which is migratory, being a rains visitor (breeding), appears to come from Africa. In India it spreads throughout the plains and hills alike, up to about 8000 feet in the Himalayas. The movements of serratus have not been fully worked out, but there is reason to believe that it winters in Africa. But much remains to be discovered regarding the distribution of this cuckoo. It appears to undergo considerable local migration. The SW. monsoon begins to set in over northern India around June, and that is when this bird arrives. Again the NE. monsoon breaks over the Nilgiris in January, and the Pied Crested Cuckoo reaches that area in the cold weather. Several observers, particularly in northern India have communicated to the papers the dates on which they first saw or heard the bird. Dewar saw it in Madras in July, at that time it is supposed to migrate northwards.

Sustained observation on the arrival of this bird was maintained by one observer for ten years in Chota Nagpur, and he recorded arrival dates between April 21 and May 23. The last date on which he observed the bird was 21 October. In Monghyr and Madhubani it is very common from May to October. At different places ranging from Jhansi and Almora in the west and Chittagong in the east, the dates vary between 20 May and the first week of July. The majority of dates being in June, almost coinciding with the break of the monsoon. In Burma it has been observed between late May and early November. My own records for Doranda (Ranchi) read:

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<u>Arrival date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Departure date</u>	<u>Monsoon breaks</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
9.ix.1953	7.13 a.m.	10.ix.1953	--	Probably return journey
1954	N	o	t	v
31.v.1955	7.10 a.m.	2.vi.1955	8.vi.1955	
1956	N	o	t	v
30.v.1957	8.10 a.m.	same day	24.v.1957	Pre-monsoon shower 10/v
1958	N	o	t	v
1959	N	o	t	v
				Rains very late
20.vi.1960	8.15 a.m.	same day	26.vi.1960	
1961	N	o	t	v
1962	N	o	t	v
				monsoon showers 12/v
1.vi.1963	9.30 p.m. (heard)	2.vi.1963	1.vi.1963	
10.vi.1963	4.15 a.m.	14.vi.1963		
16.vi.1964	11.10 a.m.	18.vi.1964	14.vi.1964	
2.vi.1965	6.30 a.m.	same day	18.vi.1965	Pre-monsoon
23.vi.1965	12.00 noon	" "		thunder shower 16.vi.1965
29.v.1966	9.00 p.m. (heard)	2.vi.1966	15.vi.1966	
9.vi.1967	4.00 a.m.	10.vi.1967	8.vi.1967	
10.vi.1968	8.00 a.m.	12.vi.1968		Occasional showers since 3/iv
21.vi.1968	6.30 a.m.	23.vi.1968	3.vi.1968	
18.v.1969	7.00 a.m.	20.v.1969	2.vi.1969	Raining since April
6.vi.1969	8.30 a.m.	7.vi.1969		

Note. A large number of observations are needed for a fuller understanding of its migratory habits.

VISITORS FROM ABROAD

B. M. Shukla

For a moment let us turn our mind away from politics — Indicate-Syndicate-Socialism-Communalism and all that — and spare a thought for our visitors from abroad. No — you need not go to Cama Hotel or Circuit House for this purpose but to place like Chandola lake and nearby jheels to meet our tourist friends, not from human world, but from avian world.

Winter months in India bring hundreds of visitors from abroad. There are tourists, V.I.Ps., politicians, cricket players, conference delegates and there are glittering conferences, seminars and din-

ner parties and all that in their honour.

But how many of us care to look round and see that thousands of other visitors from avian world also come and settle down during this period among our lakes, gardens, fields and forests adding great charm and beauty to our avifauna? Most of these birds spend winter months here and fly away to Continent or to Northern limits of our country like Tibet or Ladakh by April-May. Bird lovers call them 'migratory'. Our Income Tax department would perhaps classify them as 'Resident but not ordinarily Resident'. Foreign Exchange Regulations do not apply to them, no small-pox or cholera certificate, no pass-ports, visas or 'P' form for these visitors. They enter our borders silently and leave them without having to undergo any of these irksome formalities.

To meet these visitors, you need not go to the much advertised Nal Sarovar. They are right here on our nearest lake Chandola. The only thing required is a pair of binoculars (and perhaps a guide book).

Here on Lake Chandola you see a large congregation of ducks merrily swimming, diving or up-ending for food or basking away in mellow sun on small islands in the lake. There are Pintails so-called because of pin-like protruding tail feathers. There are Shovellers in their handsome costume of black-white and chestnut-red gliding away with open mouth through water. The common teals with their golden speculum are smaller but not the less handsome for it. Pochards with red neck and pencilled grey body disappear under water and come to surface having caught their food. The Nukta or Combeducks are conspicuous by their presence although the knob in their bill is not readily visible at present. The large orange-red Brahminy Ducks have also arrived. The black bodied and almost tail-less coots and brown coloured dabchicks are here.

From the above ducks, the pintails, shovellers, common teals, ~~combeducks~~ and pochards come from Central Europe. Brahminy ducks come from Ladakh and Tibet. The Coots are both resident as well as migratory. Some coots stay here throughout the year but their numbers are augmented in winter months by arrivals from abroad.

The varieties and numbers of visiting birds on Nal Sarovar is, of course, much greater than Chandola, but the purpose of this article is to emphasise the fact that many of these visitors are here right in our midst on the lakes and jheels for serving our towns and villages and even our gardens.

Pochards, coots and dabchicks dive under water for food. Other ducks do not dive but merely up-end and appear to some sort of 'Shirshasana' (i.e. standing over head) under water for food. This is their habit of eating.

Apart from ducks, there are other 'Waders' also at Chandola. There are Avocets in good number with impeccably white plumage lined thinly with black. There are common sandpipers and redshanks. They too come from across the Continent.

We shall be doing less than justice to our own 'native' birds if we did not take note of their presence also. We in India sometimes harbour a strange fascination for things which come from

abroad. Anything which bears a stamp 'made abroad' is considered superior to things made at home and people pay a fancy price for such things. Such superficial notions do not afflict genuine lovers of birds. Right here on Chandola we can see a good cross-section of our own beautiful birds.

There — standing on the island are our Flamingos in their glistening white and pink feathers and long curving slender neck tucked neatly into their wings. There are painted storks with white body and black wings and red stripes and stout yellow bills. Down in the water there are white stork-like spoonbills busy waving their downturned necks right and left searching for food. They are called spoon-bills because their bills are like flat spoons. The solitary grey heron is standing motionless as if in yogic trance but in reality wide awake ready to jab at its victim any moment. The pond herons are hiding in grass. There are ashy grey and somewhat dull coloured openbilled storks. There are longlegged stilts, lesser egrets and white ibis, cormorants and darters.

Sarus cranes 5 feet tall with grey body red legs and red neck are certainly one of our stateliest birds and they easily stand out among the assembly of all birds. These are only a few of our native birds found on Chandola at this time.

Turning again to our visitors, there are Common Swallows coming from Europe. Along with our native wire-tailed and red-rumped swallows the common swallows can be seen everywhere during winter months. Their magnificent sallies in air, gliding, twisting, turning are always a feast for the eye. OR you can see them perching in hundred upon telephone wires preening their wings.

Right on our lawns and fields, there are wagtails (grey, yellow-headed and white varieties) coming from Europe and Siberia. The wagtails are so called because they always wag their tails and therefore easy to recognise. Among the fields there are Rosy Pastors — flocks and flocks of them — who are one of our earliest arrivals from Europe.

Whoever said Ahmedabad is a dull and cheerless place? There is plenty of bird life here on lake Chandola and nearby jheels. It will be another thing after water gets dried up and our visitors leave in about April-May. The scene will change in summer but it will not be less interesting or less colourful because of heat.

THE PURPLE SUNBIRD

Sarah Jameson

I was very interested to read Mr R. L. Fleming's statement in the August 1969 issue of the Newsletter that Purple Sunbirds of Bihar migrate to Nepal in May and stay there for at least 5 months. I was also interested to see Mr Kameshwar Singh's letter in the October issue stating that he saw 2 males in non-breeding plumage on Sept. 14th in Patna district.

As we live in West Bengal, only 2 miles from the Bihar border, it may interest those writers to hear of our experience. I have looked

up my notes for the past few years, ever since I started birdwatching in earnest, and I find almost daily entries for the Purple Sunbird, in every single month of the year, excepting May, when I have not been here. Judging by the fact that they are one of our most familiar birds in the garden, I feel fairly certain that they must be here in May too.

Whistler writes that the winter plumage is 'assumed from about September to December ... the typical race is found in Ceylon and from about 5000 feet along the Outer Himalayas throughout the whole of India except in the north-west. There in Sind and Baluchistan it is replaced by the Persian form, C. a. brevirostris, with a shorter bill, while birds from the Punjab are mostly intermediate in character between the two races. In the main a resident species, it is also locally migratory, being found in North-western India only from March to September. In the ranges of Southern India it is found up to 7500 feet.'

The main food of the Purple Sunbird is flower nectar (though they also eat small insects), and this fact determines their habitat. Thus they are to be found in country varying from near desert to lush forestland.

Without being aware of the fact, we fortunately planted many shrubs and trees whose blossoms the Purple Sunbirds love, such as Calliandra tweedii, Kumquat, Eucalyptus citriodora, Rain Trees, etc. They are only four inches long, and look like little specks when perching on the overhead wires, and yet their song is remarkably loud, and really very beautiful. I have noted them singing in every month, except for May when I have not been here. In this garden at least, the birds excel themselves in March and April, when their singing rises to a glorious crescendo.

I quote from my notes:

January. Watched a pair bathing in heavy dew on lawn just in front of house while we breakfasted on verandah. Saw a male very close (so close that my binoculars would not focus any closer), flitting about in the Calliandra shrub, the full midday sun bringing out the most gorgeous metallic greenish purple sheens all over its body. These birds are now so familiar that I no longer rush out of the house armed with binoculars whenever I hear them.

February. Saw a female on clothes line just outside my bathroom door pulling at the frayed end of the cord on rope. Thought she must be taking it for anast, but she obviously swallowed it, as the next moment she started 'weeching' loudly with her bill wide open! Saw this happen twice. Went to look, but no cotton on the ground. She then investigated a brightly coloured clothes peg. Wonder if birds see in colour? Saw a male in the Calliandra tweedii from as close as possible with binoculars, hovering in front of a pink blossom, and had a wonderful view of the brilliant scarlet and yellow feathers in his 'armpits'. Later saw a very thin line of these colours along edge of folded wing.

March. Great excitement, found almost completed nest just outside dining room window, hung from the tip of a branch of Myrtle (which came as a very small plant from our home in Simla), about 7 feet above the ground. Alas my joy was shortlived, as some work done in the drain nearby scared the birds away for good. The pendant nest, constructed of various grasses and cobwebs, was a curious looking affair, beautifully camouflaged with odd leaves, bits of soft bark,

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Driving through Borivli Park at dusk on 14th January I noticed something rather large on the left hand side of the road some forty yards in front of me and as I slowly approached much closer 'the thing' took to steep flight and quite frightened me by its size until I realised it was a glorious Peacock (Pavo cristatus) when my heart beat faster with enjoyment, instead of terror, at the unknown 'Vampire'.. As soon as I reached home I picked up Vol. 2 of the Handbook and read once again: 'They rise with a loud flapping of wings, even an old cock with his long, heavy train rocketing almost vertically to clear the tree-tops.' During the monsoon months Borivli Park resounded with the strident calls of may-awe, may-awe and on 25th October I came across a Peahen with three chicks resting on a track running alongside a pipeline.

Of late I have been watching the female Marsh Harrier (Circus aeruginosus), which was written about by our Editor in an article published recently in a Sunday newspaper, flying over the 'damp littoral' at Vihar sending up wagtails, pipits, larks, munias, etc. and even hoopoes. I never see her catch anything; not that I'm sorry as she looks well-fed. On 19th January a King Vulture (Torgos calvus) was in the same area eating a cattle carcass in the company of Jungle Crows. But on to more pleasant subjects — also in the same few square acres or so. Namely, a fully adult male Bluethroat (Erithacus svecicus). On 17th January this sprightly robin-like bird was hopping around amongst herbage and flew when I walked towards it. Fortunately it flew only a few yards and then settled on the ground again where I had a perfect view of it for about five minutes as it hopped around picking up insects. This Bluethroat had a white (not chestnut) patch within the blue throat and was presumably of the race abbotti. The Bluethroat had quite a tussle with a green caterpillar before stunning it sufficiently to deal with. Prior to swallowing this succulent morsel the Bluethroat gave a delighted little call. Also in this area I noticed a female Collared Bushchat (Saxicola torquata), BUT no male, on the margin of the lake. I'm mentioning her because I see many male Collared Bushchats on the telegraph wires, bushes and shrubs beside the Goa Road and the road to Alibag, without seeing even one female — on some days. Against, say, fifteen males seen in a stretch of road of twenty miles I manage to see only one or two females at most. I suppose the females must be in fields further away from the roadside but I've searched in vain for them. I find that, in contrast the pairs of Pied Bushchats (Saxicola caprata) keep very close together.

There are now many Common Snipe around Vihar Lake and quite large gatherings of duck on the lake. From what I can see they are mainly Common Teal (Anas crecca) and on 4th January there were about 20 Pintails (Anas acuta) amongst them.

On 18th January on a mud-bank at Dharamtar, near Pen, there were six Avocets (Recurvirostra avosetta) swinging their bills, hockey-stick style, through the mud. With them was a Reef Heron (Egretta gularis) — slaty phase — catching mudcrawlers. It was enlightening for me to watch the bird walk to the water and wash its bill clean after each jab — whether successful or unsuccessful — into the mud.

At Panvel tank on 18th January there was an Openbill (Anastomus

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(On 2 June) In addition to the birds already mentioned, Purple Moorhens, Cattle Egrets, Paddy Birds and Smaller Egrets appear to have bred successfully during the last monsoon. Cotton Teal are also seen there now.

SELECTION OF A TWIG FOR NEST BY JUNGLE CROW (CORVUS MACRORHYNCHOS)

Dhruv Dixit

On March 15th 1969 I was sitting in the varandah of my house at Surat at 9.30 a.m., when I saw a Jungle Crow approach a Menhdi (Lawsania alba) hedge, close by. In the beginning the crow kept moving nearby the hedge. After a while it found one loose dry stick, slightly stuck in the hedge. The crow could not pull out the stick at first attempt. Then it seemed to take a good look at the stick, as if to study how the stick was entangled. The next attempt was very successful, as the crow craftily pulled the stick out with minimum effort and avoiding the obstacles.

After removing the stick the crow hopped off the hedge cover with the tick in its beak. It tried to balance the stick in its beak, but due to the additional off-shoots, the balance was improper. After viewing the twig, the crow broke the distal narrow end with its beak. Again the twig was balanced by the crow, but the balance was improper, so the crow broke the smaller side branches of the twig and finally managed to balance it in its beak properly. Then the crow laid the twig down and started observing the area around it, as if to decide the course of its homeward flight. Then it picked up the stick in its beak and balanced it carefully again and flew off steadily.

This observation helps us to understand that the crows do select their nesting material methodically and use their intelligence to shape an odd object according to their requirements. The crows also seem to have a keen sense of judging the object and its balance for flight.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

At the 10th General Assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, held at New Delhi on 29 November 1969, the John C. Phillips Medal was awarded to Dr Salim Ali. The announcement was received with tremendous acclamation. It reads as follows:

' To Shri Salim Ali, Senior Statesman of conservation and distinguished scientist, whose influence on conservation in his own continent has been great and whose work and accomplishments are known and respected throughout the world;

Most distinguished ornithologist and field naturalist in his own country, whose published works have long been the basic and authoritative references on the birds of his country and have established him in the foreground of world ornithologists;

Internationally recognized and respected leader in conservation, whose efforts over the years have been a major factor

in creating the climate of acceptance in conservation matters and preservation of wildlife which exists in his own country today. '

It is customary for each General Assembly to formulate a declaration on Conservation appropriate to the time and occasion. The declaration adopted at the IUCN Assembly reads as follows

' Realising that the splendour of this earth derives from its sunlight, its beautiful green cover, its inter-dependent fauna and flora, and from the diversity of its landscapes and Realising that since the beginning of its existence, the people of the earth even when poor in material possessions have found life richly worth living because of these natural assets;

and Realising that man, himself a product of the evolutionary system, is dependent on the stability and self-renewing properties of his environment;

Realising too, that the world's population is growing at an alarming rate;

that economic development depends entirely on the utilization of natural resources, that this utilization is carried out often with little attention to the needs of renewal,

that because of this, much of the earth, once well watered and productive, is now impoverished and degraded

that once abundant plant, animals and scenic resources, have been ravaged

that therefore the attainment of a high quality of living for all mankind now depends upon the conservation and restoration of these dwindling resources

and finally that the natural resources of the world are a heritage on which the survival of future generations must depend

We the members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources assembled at New Delhi in November 1969

Now declare again our fundamental purpose as an international union of concerned States, Organizations and individuals

To urge on all governments and people the adoption, as a basic principle of development, the conservation and protection of long term values rather than exploitation for short term gains

To foster sound environmental policies and to promote protection of ecosystems, human environments and habitats of wild creatures from abuse and damage

To encourage and assist in the making of co-ordinated legislation and international conventions to govern the utilization and treatment of soil, water, air, flora and fauna, to minimize pollution, and to protect the landscape in general and ecosystems of special interest in particular

and, in summary, to urge upon all nations, action and support of those values which make life possible and worthwhile. '

At the IVth Meeting of the Asian Continental Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation several useful resolutions were passed.

RESOLUTION 1 relates to Population Studies in Wild Birds. It recommends the importance of field studies on population ecology and breeding biology.

RESOLUTION 2 refers to the serious drain on bird population in most Asian countries resulting from commercial trapping and trade.

RESOLUTION 3 strongly recommends to the Government of India and the Government of the State of West Bengal to establish a bird sanctuary in the Calcutta Salt Lake area, as per the recommendations of the IUCN.

RESOLUTION 7 pleads for a continuation of International Bird Migration Studies in Asia. It says: ' Recognizing the significant increase in the understanding of the biology of migratory birds achieved through international cooperation in recent years, urges strongly that all Asian Nations support this vital area research by continuing studies in their countries, and RESOLVES that the I.C.B.P. Asian Continental Section shall assume the functions of coordination and exchange of information in this field. '

The President of the International Council for Bird Preservation is Dr S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.

The President issues a letter from time to time, and No. 18 of November 1969 contains an account of the recent ban on DDT in several countries. This ban has come about as a result of the strong pressure which conservationists and scientists have exerted on different governments and placed before them facts about the damage caused by organo-chlorinated hydrocarbon, in order to avoid range of species particularly threatened in the temperate environments where these chemicals have been widely used since 1940. Birds have played a rather tragic role as indicators of the extent of the damage done by DDT and other chemicals in their tissues. In England studies on the Grey Heron reveal the high percentage of toxicity of many rivers. A reference was made to this in December 1969 issue of the Newsletter p. 9. At the present time nine nations have banned the use of DDT.

CORRESPONDENCE

Trip to Karmala on 25 January 1970

The trip to Karmala Bird Sanctuary on last Sunday was very interesting. I reached the Rest House at 8.45 a.m. only, having travelled by the first available ST bus from Bombay Central. I met Mr Vipin Parikh and his relatives and Mr and Mrs Kalbaug there. We spent our time at the foot of the hills only and did not go up. The list of the birds identified is as follows: Paradise Flycatchers, Chestnutbellied Nuthatch, Black Drongo, Whitebellied Drongo, Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Rufousbacked Shrike, Purple Sunbirds, Common Iora, Magpie Robin, Indian Wren-warbler, Common Bee-eater, Verditer Flycatcher, Jerdon's Chloropsis, Goldfronted Chloropsis, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Golden Oriole.

We also saw a flycatcher of the following description: light blue

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chin and head, white throat and breast, grey-brown back and long tail. No black mark on nape. Mr Parikh feels it is a Whitebellied Blue Flycatcher on referring to Whistler's book. But on consulting Mr Robert Gruch, I now feel it may be the female of Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher. I would like to know your opinion about it.

On return, we stopped at the Panvel jheel at the roadside just out of Panvel. We saw the following birds on the jheel: Bronzewinged Jacana, Pheasant-tailed Jacana (without the long tail - in winter plumage. This gave us many difficulties in identifying as at that time we did not know its winter plumage.). Cattle Egrets, Pond Herons, Grey Wagtail, Common Swallow, Redrumped Swallow, White Wagtail, Spotted Sandpiper. On the telegraph wires, we saw the Indian Roller.

On the whole, it was very satisfying trip for me.

N. Ramakrishna
Santa Cruz, Bombay 29
January 2, 1970

Birdwatching at Surat and Baroda

Winter is a good season for studying birds and we were glad we were rewarded during our stay of a fortnight at Surat and Baroda in the third week of January.

It happily and accidentally started with the Bunting. Two flocks appearing like miniature clouds, were erratically flying over the fields. They included both the Red and Yellowheaded Buntings. The birds would occasionally swarm a tree or two beautifying them with their brilliant yellows.

We came across a similar flock of Rosy Pastors at Shri Motu's Ashram near Rander (Surat), amongst fields on the banks of Tapti river. Here we also spotted a pair of hoopoes camouflaging themselves ideally with the ground. A lapwing flew off with its did-he-do-it call and settled a little distance away. We also saw the crow-pheasant and the white wagtail.

In Surat while walking on the Olpad Road we were disappointed not to observe any bird life. However when we walked into a field, a goldenbacked woodpecker flew and sat on a palm tree. Here amongst the stalks of jowar an Indian Wren-Warbler was playing hide and seek.

On the fields nearer the Tapti on Rander side we saw apart from the drongo three types of mynas together. The common, the bank and the brahminy. Amongst others were the Common Bee-eater, the Rufous-backed Shrike, Purple Sunbird, and the White Wagtail. On the banks a whitebreasted ~~kingfisher~~ ^{kingfisher} came and sat silently for a long time on a big stone.

Near the Somnath temple on the banks of Tapti we watched a few waders. They included the spotted sandpiper, the red shank and the green shank. A little far from them were the Indian Reef Heron and the Indian Pond Heron. On a tree nearby sat a few Whitebacked Vultures.

However Gorwa Road (Alembic Colony) at Baroda gave us more pleasant surprises, both in variety and easiness for watching. On the very first day we came across a number of Indian Skylarks with pipits, hoopoes and little brown dove feeding on the ground in the compound of Alembic quarters. They would fly off and settle only a little distance away. On the second, a new find was of Blackbellied Finch

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Lark, difficult to spot but for their movements. A spotted dove sat on the telegraph wires near the Alembic farm. It repeated the Broos five times after the initial krukroo. It was seen on the same wire the next day just like the Blue Jay (Roller) which sat a little away. The Roller when approached would fly off with its glistening blues into a nearby tree and would return to the same wire after some time. On a tamarind tree (white ambli) a tree-pie suddenly came and alighted to eat the fruits but did not tarry for long. There were plenty of bee-eaters continually emitting their tree-tree electric notes. Both the white and the grey wagtails were also here. There was also a company of large grey babblers chattering their harsh kny, kay, kay. Just opposite the Alembic factory was an Indian Robin along with a Whitebacked Munia.

The most pleasant finishing touch was given by a blackwinged kite. It sat solemnly on a telegraph wire and gave a leisurely view of its grey and white body with its blackish wings. After a time it flew off only to return again on the same wire a little off.

Vipin Parikh

Bird sights in my wooded garden

A sight which thrilled me most recently was a tree-pie. It was calling loud and hard. One thing that made sure that it was the Indian Tree-pie was its flight, and the harsh calls which I heard. But I am intrigued as Dr Salim Ali has said in his BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, page 2 that they are regular members of the mixed hunting associations of the forest. I saw this tree-pie singly.

Master Girish Ananth
Delhi

Do not be intrigued. Many birds which are occasionally often seen singly may as frequently be observed as members of mixed hunting parties - Eds 7

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A BIRDPATCHER IN EAST PAKISTAN

T. J. Roberts

The old saying that 'distant fields are greener', would aptly sum up the writer's feelings during rare business visits to East Pakistan. Having lived for many years in the semi-desert, north-western part of the Sub-continent and being fairly familiar with the bird species adapted to that region, a visit into the lush green forests of East Pakistan, with their tropical fauna presents a really exotic feast to the mind and eye. From the very end of January and early February it was possible to spend about ten days over there during which every opportunity was snatched to go birdwatching. It would not be appropriate to describe all the birds sighted in this Newsletter, nor would such a long list make very interesting reading (147 species were actually recorded during this particular visit). I should like to describe therefore some of the highlights and more vivid impressions.

The end of January is probably the driest period of the year in East Pakistan, and during this visit temperatures were slightly below normal and there was no doubt a scarcity of flowering and nectar bearing plants in the forest as well as fewer inundated and swampy areas as compared to the impression obtained on previous visits. As is the unfortunate case in other adjoining countries of that region the last remnants of original forest are fast disappearing. I confined my energies to searching out and exploring what few accessible remnants of such forest remained. It may be broadly classified as tropical

evergreen rain forest, particularly in the Arakan region of Cox's Bazar. The Chittagong Hill Tracts contain a slightly higher proportion of deciduous tropical trees. In both regions there is a tremendous wealth of tree species with a thick understory of many species of palm, vines and bamboo. For the most part there are no natural clearings in such forest and one must stick to man-made footpaths or tracks made by wild elephants. Birdwatching is not easy in such conditions. Surrounded on all sides by unidentifiable calls and noises, it requires both patience and a rapid co-ordination of hand and eye to be able to glimpse even fleetingly with binoculars many of the birds which are so active in such forests. Every tall tree is festooned with the parasitic Loranthus as well as other creepers, and epiphytes such as orchids and gymnosperms. Such a tangled mass of vegetation provides all too effective cover for bird life, the great majority of which is purely arboreal in its feeding habits in such forest.

On the occasion my wife and I had tramped much further than time allowed, misguided by local villagers in our efforts to reach virgin forest. We had to content ourselves with patches of cut over forest adjacent to cultivation. A tall and apparently dead tree stood out starkly above the forest canopy. I heard a Chestnuthheaded Bee-eater (Merops leschenaulti) calling from that direction and was scanning this tree when I noticed that it bore large green figs hanging from one branch. My mind had not grasped the botanical improbability of such a conclusion when one of these fruits emitted a sharp squeak and flew away! Whereupon the entire 'fig crop' followed their companion giving toy-like high pitched screeches. They were Lorikeets (Loriculus vernalis) which are not common anywhere in East Pakistan. And I had forgotten that the books described its unique habit of roosting and sleeping whilst hanging upsidedown from a branch in bat-like fashion. Its short wings extend exactly the length of its stubby tail and when viewed ventrally with head tucked under its wing shoulder presents a most unbirdlike shape and outline. A couple of days later we stumbled across one of the rare flowering forest trees at that season in which a party of these charming parrots came to feed. They clamboured over flowering sprigs with the agility of mice and presented a most attractive picture in their green and scarlet livery. They certainly appear totally unrelated both in voice and habits to the much larger and gaudier nectar feeding Psittacidae which inhabit northern Australia and the southeast Pacific Islands and which are called Lorikeets. On another occasion we had been following another forest path for nearly two hours and felt frustrated by the apparent absence of any visible bird life. A pair of noisy woodpeckers pursued for nearly fifteen minutes refused to present themselves in any visibly accessible place. Suddenly, there came upon the ears in this wild and lonely place the steady chuff, chuff, chuff, chuff of an approaching steam engine. This was no less a creature than Buceros bicornis the Greater Hornbill which must be familiar to all readers as the insignia for the Bombay Natural History Society. This splendid bird flew right over our heads. A few rapid wing-beats then

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a glide. The wings are so short and broad that they almost meet the tail which is rather fanned out during the glides. When viewed from underneath the black and white pattern on tail and wing further presented a most beautiful and striking effect which I can only liken to some huge oriental fan. The primary underwing coverts are black but over the metacarpals and ulna of the wing itself the feathers appeared to be bright yellow. This primitive bird has very little down or protective canopy of wing-coverts and when flapping the wings air rushes through the base of the veins causing the loud whooshing sound which can be audible up to a quarter of a mile away and gave us the impression of a steam engine.

On yet another occasion having seen little of interest, we decided to leave the forest path and attempt to clamber up a steep bamboo-clad slope to get a good view of some Redbreasted Parakeets (Psittacula alexandri). These birds are actually quite common in the better-forested areas but usually one is only vouchsafed a distant view as they fly noisily calling over the tree tops. On this occasion there appeared to be three if not four parrots having an animated conversation though we found it difficult to pinpoint the source and direction of their calls. The bamboo proved so thick that we were afraid of the noise from our ascent scaring the parakeets away. However, we successfully reached our goal for the loud call emanated from a wild mango tree. Imagine our surprise on learning that the entire repertoire of screeches and loud calls came from one single bird, and it was that accomplished mimic the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (Dissemurus paradiseus). This bird is fairly widespread in all the better-forested areas and particularly up in Sylhet district.

The forest remnants of the Chittagong Hills as well as Sylhet contain a fascinating variety of drongoes. The Common or Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) avoids forest but is perhaps the most conspicuous bird in the open cultivated country and paddy fields. On the edge of forest, around orchards and tea gardens, one is more likely to encounter the Grey or Ashy Drongo (Dicrurus leucophaeus) or the Bronzed Drongo (Dicrurus aeneus). These two species can easily be mistaken for the Black Drongo and the birdwatcher should ever caution himself against the tricks played by bright sunlight and shadow. In some lights the Grey Drongo looks black all over whilst the Bronzed Drongo looks no glossier than the Black Drongo. Apart from the helpful indicator of biotope, one can best identify the Grey Drongo from trying to get a closer look at its lower flanks and belly or its irides. The flanks show a greyish ashy tinge even in poor light. The iris is crimson whereas it is dark brown in the Black as well as the Bronzed Drongo. The Bronzed Drongo is slightly smaller on average than the Black Drongo and much more graceful in flight. Its call notes are distinctive but since it is a clever mimic of other bird calls this is not always a helpful guide to identification. In a favourable light the spangling of the breast feathers as well as the mantle and wing-coverts helps to confirm the identification. I have always felt that the name 'Bronzed' is misleading, conjuring up visions of burnished

golds and browns. The gloss of the Bronzed Drongo reflects rather a metallic blue and green light. Whilst the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo seems to stick to heavier forest the Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus remifer) appears to be the rarest and shyest representative of the Dicruridae in East Pakistan. Another very large sized drongo, which sticks to heavy forest, is the Hair-Crested Drongo (Dicrurus hottentottus). This noisy bird occurs in the Arakan, throughout the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Eastern Sylhet. In my experience the curious long hair-like crest feathers are very difficult to see in the field but the calls are distinctive even when the bird is not visible and the curled outer tail feathers are unmistakable from almost any angle. Likened to the tail fins of a World War II Halifax Bomber in Smythies (The Birds of Burma, by B. E. Smythies, 1953. Oliver & Boyd), felicitous phrase, one especially thinks of this bird as a dive bomber when it swoops to capture some unwary insect. Actually the outer tail feathers are rolled or curled inwards at the tip of their outer web like the front of an old-fashioned toboggan.

SIGNS OF SUMMER PLUMAGE AND SONG AND NOTES ON BIRDS OF PREY IN THE BOMBAY AREA

D. A. Stairmand

At Erangal, Marve, on 22/ii there was a beautiful Blackheaded Yellow Wagtail (Motacilla flava melanogrisea) feeding around the legs of cattle. It was in the most glorious fresh summer plumage with black crown, cheeks and ear-coverts deep black, upper plumage yellowish green and the whole lower plumage bright yellow. The bird was far too engrossed in catching insects disturbed by the cattle to bother about me watching it and later on I saw it on grassy flats with two White Wagtails (Motacilla alba) one of which had the full black bib of summer. There was also a Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis) with the drove of cattle and this bird had a smudge on the top of its head. A prelude to the very attractive breeding plumage, I think.

The Reef Herons (Egretta gularis) both at Breach Candy, where they are 30+ strong, and at Marve acquired their nuchal crests before the end of January and some of the Grey Plovers (Pluvialis squatarola) seen on moist grassland at Marve on 7/ii were in partial breeding plumage. Even the Common Swallows (Hirundo rustica) appear to be smarter. Their blue is definitely glossy and I can plainly see the pale pinkish colour below, but the chestnut coloration does not yet remind me of them at their best. The Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus) and Blackheaded Gulls (Larus ridibundus) on Mahim Creek were attaining summer dress by mid February.

The male Magpie Robins (Copsychus saularis) were in fine song at Marve on 22/ii but the song will get more confident, louder and more prolonged. For the moment, however, it is a joy to hear it again after all the months of skulking shyness when only plaintive or harsh notes were to be heard. Also on the same day a male Purplerumped Sunbird (Nectarinia zeylonica) was singing excitedly atop an attractive Mango

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in flower (I hope the crop is a good one) in the glorious evening sunlight. I realise he might well do this at any time of the year but, to me, he was one of the heralds of the fast approaching summer. Near Pen on 17/ii a male Collared Bushchat (Saxicola torquata) was singing a pretty little song. The Collared Bushchats' numbers were fewer than previously and there were, for a change, almost as many females as males to be seen from the roadside. The male Redstart (Phoenicurus ochruros) and probably the male of the two Desert Wheatears (Oenanthe deserti) seemed to have departed from a stony hillock at Erangal by 21/ii. The female Redstart was still around the ruins of an old outpost at the base of the hillock and the other Desert Wheatear was on the hillock in the usual territory.

I feel I must mention, in gratitude, that I have recently spent some wonderful days watching birds of prey mostly in the Taloja area and around Pen. Watching the handsome Kestrels (Falco tinnunculus) hovering, some times for a few minutes at a time, has perhaps been the greatest thrill but so many of the birds of prey are graceful. The Blackwinged Kite (Elanus caeruleus) is also interesting to watch as it hovers and parachutes down on the look-out for prey. Pale Harriers (Circus macrourus) are more common around Nasik but I have seen several in the Taloja and Pen areas skimming gracefully over the fields and dropping over bunds in search of the unwary. On 14/ii near Taloja I was lucky enough to see a male Montagu's Harrier (Circus pygargus). In habits and looks it is very like the male Pale Harrier but the male Montagu's Harrier's narrow black transverse wing-bar across the secondaries was diagnostic in this bird. I invariably carry a well-thumbed copy of Dr Salim Ali's The Book of Indian Birds with me and the Plate containing the White-eyed Buzzard (Buteo teesa) in this book depicted quite perfectly the first bird I ever recognized of this species as it sat high up in a big Mango above a brick-kiln off the Goa Road just south of Pen. In flight, with its rounded wings, it reminded me a bit of the Shikra (Accipiter badius). That most familiar of all our raptors the Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans) came squealing downwards over the 'flats' at Marve on 22/ii dislodging a Whitebreasted Kingfisher and a Common Kingfisher from their look-out posts on telegraph wires and swooped at a Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticula) which had a broken wing. The plover managed to elude the Kite two times by dodging around small rocks but at the third attempt the Kite was successful and the poor plover was borne away high into the air and dismantled. Its white feathers drifted across the azure sky on that lovely afternoon.

The arch bird-of-play the hornbill (Tockus griseus) was seen by me, from the Goa Road, in Karnala Sanctuary on 17/ii. The relevance? It attracted my attention from a moving car by squealing like a Pariah Kite that had had a big needle stuck into its bottom!

BIRDS IN INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY. Supplementary Note

Sálim Ali

Along with the parakeets, perhaps the most destructive bird pests of cereal crops in India, especially of paddy in the rice producing areas of the country, are the weaver birds (family Ploceidae), the most widely distributed and abundant species of which is the Baya Weaver (Ploceus philippinus). Recent feeding experiments with captive bayas have shown that an adult bird weighing 20 g on the average will consume about 3 g of unhusked paddy per day — a quantity equal to about 15% of its own body weight; under natural free-flying conditions the intake is probably higher. In rice growing areas, and in season, paddy forms the food of adult bayas almost exclusively supplemented sometimes by a small quantity of weed-seeds and the like. Allowance must also be made for the extra weight of the paddy husk when comparing the birds' food with the huskless rice eaten by humans. Therefore somewhat arbitrarily we will assume that a single baya eats only 2 g of rice per day.

In Kerala, which is a predominantly rice-eating region, the quantum of rice under the statutory food rationing scheme is 2 kg per person per month (in addition to wheat etc.), or about 66 g of rice per day. This means that 33 bayas could run through an adult Keralite's entire daily rice ration in the same time! No attempt has ever been made to estimate the baya population in a rice-growing area, even by a rough and ready count but in the season of paddy ripening it must certainly run into several thousand birds per hectare, which gives an indication of the enormity of the economic loss they must cause to the cultivator. The ravages to the paddy crops are by no means confined to the Baya; parakeets, House Sparrows and munias add to the cultivator's woes, and in winter swarms of buntings, especially the Blackheaded and the Redheaded species, help to intensify the devastation.

House Sparrows (Passer domesticus) are just as destructive to cereal crops; in the winter months their numbers get vastly augmented by migrant extralimital races from the north — parkini from Kashmir and bactrianus from Turkestan — and Spanish Sparrows (P. hispaniolensis transcaspicus). Their abundance in parts of the country then is truly phenomenal, and their combined depredations on ripening wheat and other cereal crops colossal in proportion.

The only attempt at a scientific assessment of the food of birds in India, chiefly from an agricultural point of view, was made in Bihar in the first decade of the present century by C. V. Mason and H. Maxwell-Lefroy. The report of the investigations, published as a Memoir of the Department of Agriculture in India (Vol. 3, Entomological Series, January 1912) is a valuable document. Unfortunately it has been out of print for many years and copies are not easily procurable. Stomach contents of 15 Orders and 40 Families of Passerine and Non-Passerine birds of an intensively cultivated agricultural tract were analysed, particularly for the identification of the insect food and assessment of the birds therefrom as harmful, beneficial or of neutral

status to agriculture. The conclusions were bound to be somewhat one-sided since the investigations largely ignored the other components of the birds' diet, and other aspects of the food and feeding habits of many species such as the different nature of the food brought to the nestlings and eaten by the adults themselves. The accent throughout the investigations was naturally on agricultural economy, and the findings took little account of the various indirect ways in which birds can be beneficial or harmful to other human interests such as forestry, animal husbandry and public health.

Some aspects of the importance of birds to India's forests, and to vegetation in general, are not sufficiently known or appreciated: for example their role in the fertilization of flowers and dispersal of seeds of numerous plant species, economically beneficial or the contrary. Specially adapted nectar-eaters, e.g. Sunbirds and Chloropses do important service by cross-pollinating many of the flowers they visit in quest of their food. Our experiments have proved, for instance, that the flowers of the Silk Cotton Tree, Salmalia malabarica (which largely supplies the wood for our indigenous safety matches) are chiefly pollinated by birds — the regular nectar eaters as well as many other non-specialized species. Bunches of flowers were covered over with coarse-meshed wire netting which permitted access to the usual insect visitors but excluded the usual birds. The result was that whereas the uncontrolled flowers set seed in the normal way, those from which bird contact was withheld withered and dropped off, with very few exceptions. Not being adapted exclusively for ornithophily, some of the blossoms were apparently fertilized by visiting insects. The case of the harmful mistletoe family of plant parasites, Loranthaceae, which cause serious damage to mango trees in orchards and teak trees in forest plantations are largely — some species wholly — dependant on flower-birds for cross-pollination, and on frugivorous birds for seed dispersal. Their flowers are of what is known as the 'explosive' type. The buds of Loranthus longiflorus, the commonest species in the Bombay area are in shape and size exact sheaths for a sunbird's bill. Even when fully mature they remain tightly closed until pressure is exerted on the tumescent apex by a visiting bird's bill. On a gentle squeeze from the bill tip the bud suddenly springs open, permitting the bird to insert its bill into the corolla for the nectar. The essential organs of the flower are so placed that in the process they come in contact with the sunbird's throat and forehead feathers. The pollen that adheres to them is carried to the next flower and gets dusted on to the style which overtops the anthers. Experiments preventing access to the mature buds of its regular pollinators — sunbirds, white-eyes and chloropses — showed that the buds shrivelled up and dropped without opening, whereas their uncovered neighbours set fruit in the normal course.

From all this it is obvious that what is essential in order to determine the true status of birds in India and their role in our national economy — agriculture, forest and public health — is comprehensive life history studies of the individual species involved — their ecology, food and feeding habits, migrations and local movements,

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and their population structure and dynamics. Analysis of stomach contents, though of great value in indicating the food trends, is by itself not enough. It must be supplemented by other analytical techniques and above all by a careful field study of the feeding habits to provide the complete picture. In regard to insect food, for instance, many parts such as the wings of moths are discarded before the insect is eaten or fed to the young, therefore they will practically never be found among the stomach contents. Soft parts of insects soon disintegrate making the species of prey unidentifiable except by clues fortuitously provided by hard remains such as elytra of beetles or heads of moths.

Birds have long been suspected, or actually incriminated, in the dissemination of arthropod-borne viruses causing epidemics sometimes fatal to man and his livestock. The periodical incidence and spread of foot-and-mouth disease of cattle in England has been circumstantially attributed to migratory starlings from the Continent. Nearer home, the Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) of Mysore, caused by a virus practically indistinguishable from that of the Russian Spring-Summer Fever (RSS), is also suspected to have reached here from its West-Siberian focus through the agency of migratory birds. With the sponsorship of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and other international organizations, investigations are under way by the Bombay Natural History Society on this aspect of India bird migration.

The urgent need in India today is a properly organized centre for research in economic ornithology in its widest sense, covering every aspect of the contacts of birds with man and his concerns; it is to be hoped that the discussions at this Conference¹ will stress the importance and desirability of such research sufficiently to initiate overdue governmental action.

¹This was a supplementary paper presented to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources General Assembly in November 1969 at New Delhi. — Ed.

MIGRATION OF BIRDS

Robert B. Grubb

The secret of bird migration is still unravelled though various plausible theories have been put forward. To put it differently, we still are ignorant of the 'why' portion of the migration. But we know to some extent the 'how' part of it. Here we shall precisely discuss the migratory routes, speed of migratory flights, altitude, influence of wind and other weather conditions on migrating birds, and their general migratory behaviour.

Maps showing migration routes based on the recovery of banded birds are often misleading especially when the birds are banded and recovered at their destinations (i.e. breeding grounds and winter quarters) and not along their course. For instance, the Bombay Natural History

Society has been banding birds at Bharatpur, Rajasthan, one of the main wintering areas for waterbirds. These birds are recovered in several parts of the USSR including the Siberian region where the birds breed. Thus we connect Bharatpur and, say Norilsk on the map by a straight line. It would appear quite natural to consider that the bird took a straight course along this line. In reality, however, the linking line indicates only the primary direction of the journey.

The actual migratory route is far from straight, and is often subject to the weather conditions, feeding grounds, and the topographical aspects of the route. Occasionally the birds take a curve, and at times they even take a totally opposite direction for a while. The migratory route includes all these. To get at least a rough idea of these routes millions of birds should be banded in India, and the birds recovered from all along their paths, in addition to direct observations by ornithologists at various stations. This would mean a full cooperation from all the neighbouring countries including China. While hundreds of banded birds have been annually reported to the Society by the USSR, not a bit of information has been obtainable from China. Someone commented once: 'Perhaps they don't even spare the rings'.

The migratory routes can be differentiated into two. The first one called the narrow route is used by only a small percentage of birds. For example, some storks use a long and narrow flyway through eastern Europe and the Near East. The reason is their aversion to cross the wide sea. In the second category the birds take several flyways spread over a wide area. The width of these routes varies with the species and the geographical conditions. At certain places these multiple airways may converge because of a narrow territory where the migrants get funnelled down in dense concentrations. As the passage broadens the birds once again spread out themselves.

Many species prefer to follow low contour routes, rivers and valleys to enjoy easier flying conditions. Very often the birds have been noted to deviate from the straight course just for the pleasure of a flight through the valleys, which are a great attraction for them. Just as the rivers and valleys attract the migratory birds, certain areas strongly repel them. Land birds, especially Passerines, hesitate to cross wide waterways. In certain cases when they reach the shore after a journey across the land, and still have to cross a wide stretch of sea to reach the destination, they feel reluctant to proceed further and change their course temporarily to fly along the shore, just to delay the inevitable.

Migrants are also lured by islands. According to the Dutch observers terrestrial birds, after crossing the sea between the Netherlands and the Frisian Islands, fly east-west, but change the direction to fly the entire length of these islands. The birds seem reluctant to leave the islands when again they have to turn west over the water. Whereas the sea repels land migrants, land seems to repel sea birds. Some species change their course innumerable times to avoid the land although they can save considerable time and energy by flying over small strips of land.

These observations do not apply always for different species have different patterns of behaviour which are in turn modified by physical surroundings, weather, and psychological factors of flocks or individuals. Many birds are not influenced by the territory over which they have to travel. The Lesser Blackbacked Gulls from the Baltic, for example, cross the whole continent of Europe to their wintering grounds at Mediterranean, some even proceeding further to East Africa crossing unfavourable habitats including deserts. Certain species, when they have to cross high mountain ranges, fly over the highest peaks stoically, instead of using the comparatively easier passes. Multitudes of small and big birds including ducks and geese cross over the Himalayas from central Asia, to winter in various parts of India.

The migratory flight is faster than the normal flight of a bird, still holding a higher potential speed. The speed of the birds cannot be accurately measured because of the effect of the wind. However, as a result of several experiments under average conditions we now know that the hawks travel at a speed of 30 to 40 miles per hour, waders between 40 and 50 miles, while many ducks and geese at 50 to 60. At such speeds the birds can be assumed to fly long distances in a relatively short time. Of course they do cover several miles each day or night (certain birds make migratory flights during night while others fly during the day, irrespective of their normal habits). They fly about ten hours at a stretch and then come down to rest and feed. However, very often the birds rest and feed too long. This tendency, combined with other factors discussed earlier make the journey much longer.

(To be continued)

SOME MORE BIRDS AT KARNALA

Vipin Parikh

Subsequent to our visit on 25th January (Newsletter, March 1970) we had a second and delightful outing to Karnala on Sunday, the 18th March. The day had mixed surprises in that we did not see some of the birds sighted in January, while on the other hand there were fresh and joyful additions to our list.

The first sighted was the Whitebreasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis) perched silently on a telegraph wire and we wondered what it could be doing in a forest. However, we were at rest when we read in Salim Ali that it is 'also in light forest at considerable distance from water'. The next we saw were the Goldfronted Chloropses (Chloropsis aurifrons), but they were not as frequent and not also in large numbers as we saw them on previous visit. Perhaps, may be because the Silk Cotton trees that were flowering last time had shed their flameboyant flowers and were bare. Nor were we fortunate to come across the Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher (Monarcha azurea) so frequently seen earlier. A new find was the Common Wood Shrike (Tephrodornis pondicerianus) with its short tail and squat build, the white

supercilium over the eye being prominent and diagnostic. We saw it twice but on both occasions, singly.

But the most pleasant of our surprises came at the Rest House. Here in a relaxed mood, we could watch from the verandah our avian friends with brilliant colours at leisure, without straining our necks or our eyes. It was a day of the flycatchers and the first to be seen was the Verditer Flycatcher (Muscicapa thalassina) followed by the Blueheaded Rock Thrush (Monticola cinclorhynchus) with its chestnut breast and conspicuous white wing patches. Oft and on the Verditer would come on a nearby tree laden with berries, make its typical flycatcher sallies and return to a tree not far away. Somehow whenever it returned it was always followed by the thrush. Both also left the tree one after the other. However, a brownish bird on the same tree, with horizontal markings on its whitish breast puzzled us about its identity. Later on we could confirm it as the female of the Blueheaded Rock Thrush from the Hill Birds. Its whitish rings round the eyes were also quite typical. Again on the same tree, a third pleasant surprise was offered to us by a blue and white flycatcher, with its blue unjoined necklace on pure white breast, and a white streak prominent above the eye. Here again, from the Hill Birds, we could identify it as the Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher (Muscicapa superciliaris). All the three flycatchers were so frequent for hours together that later on we even did not rush out with our binos. The only regret was not to have heard the call notes of even one of them.

On the adjoining flowering tree the Purple Sunbird (male and female) hovered restlessly on the blossoms. It was later followed by a brilliant sunbird almost of the size of a thumb. We were wondering if it was the Purplerumped, but its bright red rump and back revealed it to be the Small Sunbird (Nectarinia minima).

Earlier in the morning a pair of spotted doves delighted us with their cooing and allowed us a leisurely watch. Our friends Mr Shah and Vijay Bhutt had gathered that it would be possible to see the Green Pigeon and the Emerald Dove. Throughout the day we kept our eyes and ears sharp with expectation and ultimately left with a little disappointment. But the day on the whole, brimmed with exuberance of new finds and brilliant colours

CORRESPONDENCE

A Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela) capturing its prey

About five o'clock of a late November evening, our party found its way to the little fairyland known as the Nachne Water Works, a couple of miles beyond the eastern outskirts of Ratnagiri. Two small but perennial springs of water trickle from either side, at the head of a long narrow gorge, forming a shallow pool at their tiny 'sangam'. The whole gorge is thickly roofed by the trees growing on its steep banks. A haunt of peace, and birds. It was here, twenty-five years ago, that I found a Blacknaped Flycatcher's nest which, since it was still in good condition although its purpose was finished, I took and

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presented to the Prince of Wales Museum.

As we scrambled, as quietly as possible, down into the gorge, my daughter whispered, 'Dada, what's that big bird over there?'. I looked in the direction she indicated, and there, on the bank of the Sangam Pool, about fifty paces from us, sat a dark heavy bird whose size so astonished me that it was a few seconds before I could recognize it. 'It's a Crested Serpent Eagle', I whispered back.

The bird was intently watching the pool, quite oblivious of our presence. Suddenly it lurched clumsily forward and launched itself on to the surface of the pool, where it lay with spread wings like an enormous moth afloat. Thus it lay for two or three seconds, after which it rose with a convulsive struggle. As it flapped heavily away through the thin undergrowth, we saw that it held a water snake in its talons.

This was the first time I had actually seen a Serpent Eagle capture its prey. And if anyone else had told me that these birds sometimes catch it in the water, like an osprey, I should have dismissed it as a fisherman's yarn. However, I saw it happen — and I have three witnesses!

Thomas Gay

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The King Vulture (*Torgus calvus*): A vanishing species in Bihar

I want to draw the attention of the Bird-lovers and Ornithologist in the country to the fact that this species is perhaps becoming scarce nowadays and I may venture to remark that this vulture is now rare at least in this part of the country. For the last many years I am keeping a constant watch over this bird and I have seen it only on one or two occasions and that also a single bird at a time. Not a single bird has been seen by me in my recent wanderings through Tirhut and Patna Divisions of Bihar. I cannot say anything about S. Bihar, i.e. Chota Nagpur. Birdwatchers from that area can report its position thence. For the rest of the country it is for the birdwatchers to confirm or deny my apprehensions.¹

I hope that other birdwatchers will report their observations regarding this species in the Newsletter.

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¹ The Editor was happy to find two pairs of King Vultures in the Madumalai Sanctuary of Tamil Nadu recently.

Early rising of the Indian House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)

'n 3 April 1968 around 03.00 hours as I suddenly woke up from the bed I found the sky clear of clouds. It was at that time I witnessed a peculiar behaviour of the House Crow. There was a ~~loud~~ chorus of loud calls in quick succession from the nearby roosting trees. The

intensity of the call increased gradually showing that more and more crows were joining the cacophony. The chorus continued till 04.30 when I saw a crow leaving its roost from a coconut (Cocos nucifera) palm. It was soon followed by other crows in groups of twos or more from different roosting sites of the locality. By about 04.50 hours all the crows of the area appeared to have left their roost well before dawn. The sun rose that day at 05.30 hours. The next day I purposely came out on the terrace of my house around 02.00 hours and was surprised to hear the cacophony already in progress. At that time the intensity of the calls was low. This was presumably because only a limited number of birds were then uttering the call. The intensity of the call gradually increased and by 03.50 this attained the highest pitch. From about 04.30 the crows started leaving the roost. It appeared, therefore, that the call started with one bird in the roost, which was ardently caught up by the neighbouring birds so as to increase the pitch of the call as time rolled on. This early rising and call of the House Crow was observed till 6 April 1968. From 7 April 1968 to 11 April 1968 their first call was not heard before 04.40 hours of the day.

S. C. Koul (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 47: 386, 1950) and P. I. R. Maclaren (ibid. 48: 372, 1951) reported the first call of the day by the House Crow about sixty minutes before sunrise. It is not clear, therefore, whether this midnight rising of the crows was the result of any disturbance in their gathering as reported by Bates and Lowther (Breeding Birds of Kashmir, 1962. Oxford Univ. Press). However, as their call was heard in the moonlight night only for a few days, it may be presumed that the crows misjudged the moonlit night as the advent of dawn and gave out morning call until they realized their mistake.

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THE COUCAL OR CROW-PHEASANT, *Centropus sinensis* (Stephen)

S. V. Nilakanta

The deep and resonant cooop, coop, coop, coop sound, which was heard morning and evening for the past few days had announced the arrival of the Coucal in our vicinity.

Even without seeing a bird it is possible to roughly estimate its size by the sound it makes. It is a property of sound that low notes require a lot of power to produce. It will be noticed that low notes requize more breath to whistle and more energy is required to pound the piano keys on the extreme left end, which produce the lower notes of the scale, than to strike those on the right end. Small and weak birds and animals can make only higher pitched sounds.

The Coucal is certainly a large bird but was not easily seen for a few days. Most birds which come and go once a year are rather shy for a short time when they first arrive. In the course of a few weeks they become increasingly bolder and once they become confident that we mean them no harm, come closer and closer in search of food.

The coucal is a bird of stealthy habits and skulks in hedges and bushes. As mentioned before, it is a large bird and is of the size of the jungle crow. In shape it resembles the male koel and belongs to the same family. It is glossy black all over and has bright chestnut wings, which are rather small (8 inches) for a bird of such size. The tail, however, which is long, broad and graduated is 10 inches and therefore longer than that of a jungle crow. Like the koel, the coucal has bright red eyes which to my fanciful imagination appear to be cruel. The eyes are provided with bristles like eyelashes.

The bill of the coucal is large, deep and black, the culmen being curved. In proportion it is not as large as the crow's. The back of the crow's neck shows iridescent patches of purple and blue and that of the coucal, green and blue.

The feet of the coucal are black and the toes are zygodactyl. This means that it has four toes and wears the first toe backwards besides the hind toe or hallux. The claw of the hallux is absolutely straight unlike the claws of the other toes which are curved. In this respect it differs from the other members of the family of cuckoos.

Although the coucal makes such a loud booming noise it is not always very easy to locate it by sound. This brings us to another property of sound; which is that unlike high pitched sounds which travel more or less in straight lines, low pitched sound can go around curves and can stand a lot of reflection without being diminished much in volume. It is said that a lion's roar appears to come from all directions.

In addition to the coop, ccop sound the coucal also makes some bubbling hoots and harsh raucous sounds. I have heard the coop, coop being uttered and answered by two coucals some distance from each other. Like the koel the coucal will answer a human voice which imitates its call although the imitation may be a very bad one and may have hardly any resemblance to the real thing. The coucal probably makes all these sound to establish the presence or absence of other claimants to its chosen territory. Having established itself, it familiarises itself with every part of its territory.

Coucals are found all over India and must be quite common. I have never heard of or come across a large congregation of coucals. They live in bush jungles, river and canal banks, in tall grassland dotted with trees and in gardens.

The zygodactyl feet of the coucal like the feet of parrots are designed to enable the bird to climb. Coucals are expert climbers and walk up a tree with apparently no effort. The coucal that has arrived in our neighbourhood, has established paths and routes through the trees and can be seen climbing particular branches in exactly the same way every time.

The rounded wings are quite small and inadequate to enable the bird to maintain sustained flight. Therefore, the bird climbs up to a point of vantage and glides down to another point. We cannot expect to look up into the blue sky and see coucals flying at great speed like green parakeets, nor can we expect it to migrate from country to country like some other members of the Cuckoo family.

One would expect such an awkward, clumsy bird to climb trees and eat fruit but that is not so. The coucal is almost exclusively non-vegetarian and finds its food on the ground by walking along hedges and thickets. This habit has misled people into thinking of it as some kind of a pheasant and with its long tail and black colour has earned itself the well known name of Crow-Pheasant.

Some members of my household who get sudden bursts of enthusiasm for gardening have grown some green coriander near the backdoor steps. Yesterday (11.iv.1970) our coucal was in the middle of this green plot, digging its bill repeatedly into the coriander and tramp-

ling down a sizeable patch. For a moment I thought that the bird had turned vegetarian but my doubts were dispelled by its holding aloft a large slug which was beaten into an oozy mess and swallowed with apparent relish.

This morning I was watching the coucal turning over dead leaves. Suddenly it found something which was making frantic efforts to escape. After the display of some agile footwork which was aided by a spread tail, the coucal secured a large, brown locust. Small snakes, lizards, large insects, frogs, slugs and snails are all food to the coucal which also eats the eggs of other birds and kills baby birds that cannot fly. Some years back the tailor birds here were breeding successfully at an alarming rate and even as I wondered what would happen, the timely arrival of a coucal solved the problem of the population explosion.

The eating habits of the coucal do not allow large numbers to gather together. Perforce, each bird or pair must have their own separate hunting ground or Nature's balance between predator and prey would be upset.

Unlike the koel, the coucal does not lay its eggs in a crow's nest. This is a pity because we would like to see the crow population under control. Being a non-parasitic cuckoo, it builds its own nest of a globular shape, made of grass and twigs, with a side entrance. The tail of a nesting coucal often sticks out of the entrance hole.

The nesting season is during the rainy months when food is plentiful. Three to four chalky, white eggs about the size of medium-sized domestic hen's eggs are laid. The female coucal is slightly larger than her mate. The coucal chicks are hatched naked and develop normal feathers without going through a downy phase.

While sending these notes to the editor, we are hoping that the coucal will soon acquire a mate. It will be quite entertaining to watch the courtship display of the male which evidently consists of wing spreading and tail raising. Even now the coucal struts about like a peacock on my neighbour's roof-top. The coucal may of course wander away from this safe locality and fall a prey to the catapults and air-guns of the local village boys. The bird is considered worth eating and quite unjustifiably recommended for the cure of chest troubles.

A BIRDWATCHER IN EAST PAKISTAN

T. J. Roberts

In a previous issue of the Newsletter (Vol. 17(4):1-4, April 1970) the writer recounted some of the highlights of a recent visit to different parts of the evergreen rain forest of East Pakistan. This visit was made from the end of January to early February, perhaps at a season when bird life is at its lower ebb in such forest due to the brief influence of winter and the comparative paucity of forest trees in the fruiting or flowering stage which attract feeding birds.

Despite the season, we were lucky on two occasions to witness a

hatch of winged termites which always provides a feast for a multitude of birds. I am told by my entomologist friends that there are scores of distinct species of termite even on this sub-continent and that new forms have only recently been described. These white ants, however, appeared very similar to the common form which occurs in the dry regions of West Pakistan, in that they emerged from their underground galleries just at dusk having presumably all hatched about the same time. Their two pairs of long wings enable them to ascend vertically but their flight is laboured and they are easy targets for birds. Moreover because of their comparatively succulent bodies they are eagerly sought after. On the first occasion the termites emerged from a patch of secondary scrub on the edge of a pineapple plantation, in a region where the original forest had long since been removed. Consequently there was not a very great variety of birds in the area which could be attracted to the feast but we were fascinated to watch the aerial sallies of even the furtive Redfronted Babblers (Stachyris rufifrons) which otherwise feed exclusively near the ground and in dense undergrowth. It was also a delight to watch the swift and graceful swoops of about a score of Redwhiskered Bulbuls (Pycnonotus jocosus). A few Redvented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer) which joined the scene did not appear nearly as graceful or adept at catching these insects in flight.

On the second occasion we were in some true forest up in Sylhet. Dusk was falling and we were hastening along a rather narrow path between overhanging bamboos, anxious to regain the clearing and roadside before darkness fell. Suddenly our attention was drawn to the noisy chatter of Hair-crested Drongos (Dicrurus hottentottus) and less than fifteen yards away we could see a column of termites whirling upwards like a host of small helicopters. There appeared to be not less than six Hair-crested Drongos taking turns to dive into the melee from different directions, returning to a nearby branch to devour their succulent capture. During our previous two hours walk in the forest we had failed to observe any of this species. There were also several Bronzed Drongos (Dicrurus aeneus) and one Grey Drongo (Dicrurus leucophaeus). Even a Bristled Barbet (Megalaima lineata) and two Blackheaded Orioles (Oriolus xanthornus) came to join the feast and it was amusing to see the clumsy hopping rushes of the Barbet as it tried to capture an insect without ascending above the trees. There were several Whitethroated Bulbuls (Criniger flaveolus) which also seemed comparatively clumsy in their aerial sallies whereas a smaller Blackheaded Bulbul (Pycnonotus atriceps) seemed more graceful. By this time a number of Greyheaded Myras (Sturnus malabaricus) had also joined the throng. As darkness was falling we regretfully left the busy scene and as we reached the edge of the forest and obtained a clearer view of the open sky we could see that those termites which had escaped the initial onslaught were now providing a feast for a dozen or more Small Grey Cuckoo-Shrikes (Coracina melaschistos) whose effortless planing flight showed that this was one of their normal ways of obtaining food. As though to finish the exhibition of bird flight display, we were also rewarded with a fine view of a Blacknaped

Oriole (Oriolus chinensis) which is comparatively uncommon in Sylhet compared with the ubiquitous Blackheaded Oriole (Oriolus xanthornus) and also a very brief but unmistakable glimpse of a Fairy Bluebird (Irena puella) belatedly attracted to the scene. Fairy Bluebirds are noisy birds and usually easy to detect because of their fondness for perching at the very top of trees but this was our only glimpse of this species during ten days.

The sunbirds afford a special attraction to a visitor from the dry northwest, where but one species, Nectarinia asiatica, occurs throughout. In freshly moulted spring plumage, and good sunlight, even the Purple Sunbird (Nectarinia asiatica) can be a scintillating jewel. But it is nothing compared with the dazzling beauty of the two fairly common sunbirds in the forests of East Pakistan which are Yellowbacked Sunbird (Aethopyga siparaja) and Van Hasselt's Sunbird (Nectarinia sperata). This latter species has a short square tail like the Purple Sunbird and the male can appear all black in certain lights. The colouring of sunbirds' plumage is so dependent on refraction of light that it is often difficult to discern any shade but black especially if compelled to look upwards into bright sunlight. But patience is usually rewarded, for these restless, active little birds are not particularly shy of man and in their concern with threatening rivals of the same species or when trying to capture every tiny insect disturbed they generally display themselves from several different angles. Van Hasselt's Sunbird is capped with brilliant green and the feathers on the side of the nape look like tiny golden scales in certain lights. Underneath its scimitar curved black beak and beady eye, its throat and upper breast glisten with purple and rosy cyclamen lights like an amethyst. The lower breast and belly merges into a rich burnished copper-red which is nicely offset by the black wings.

Perhaps the biggest thrill during this visit was a sighting in comparatively unromantic surroundings. In a visit to the Chittagong Hill Tracts our road eventually terminated at the site of a dam and hydroelectric works at Kaptai. Standing on the concrete roadway which sweeps down to the shore of the artificial lake, my eye caught a swiftly flying bird as it swooped down to the water to capture a dragonfly. There were plenty of Ashy Swallow Shrikes (Artamus fuscus) in the vicinity and as this bird flew up from the lake the rapid beats of its narrow dark wings seemed to confirm the identification. But then as it flew up my eye saw that it was passing its capture to its beak from its feet in a gesture at once reminiscent of a feeding raptor. With mounting excitement I realized that I was looking at a tiny Falconet. There was a pair, and they were Redbreasted Falconets (Microhierax caerulescens), both had their favourite perch at the top of a tall tree and returned thence after occasional dragonfly hunting sorties so that there was ample opportunity to study them. The female was noticeably larger but both seemed so beautifully proportioned that they looked like miniature Hobbies with their dark slatey blue crowns, back and wings and broad loreal streak below the eye. Their legs were blackish brown and the heavily feathered tibia was a bright rufous-red. Having seen some years ago, captive falconets of this

species in the Regent's Park Zoo (they had come from Malaya) my recollections were of rather ill-proportioned, and pathetic bedraggled little birds. The wild falconets at Kaptai seemed every inch the fierce hunting falcon with perfect proportions and certainly emphasized how difficult it is to evoke the wild beauty of many creatures once they are confined and restrained within the bars of a zoo.

MIGRATION OF BIRDS. Part 2

Robert B. Grubb

(Continued from p. 10, Vol. 10(4), April 1979)

Jean Dorst (1962, Migration of Birds) gives the following interesting information: 'In some instances migrants must cover long distances without a break. Land birds flying from Scandinavia to Great Britain fly 220 to 400 miles non-stop! North American migrants fly 500 to 600 miles when they cross the Gulf of Mexico on their long trip south, yet this flight is made by small passerines, even humming birds, none of which can pause for rest on the sea! Migrants on their way to or from New Zealand travel 625 to 940 miles non-stop, but the record seems to be held by the American Golden Plover, which apparently flies 2065 miles from Alaska to the Hawaiian Islands without stopping.

'Migrants travelling overland seem to tarry along the way and to progress in stages, with rest stops in between which may last a day or more. An average 'days' flight (often by night) is from ninety to 155 miles, which represent only six to eight hours in the air. Some migrants average only 65 miles a day. The European roller, for example, leaves its breeding territory in August, or September at the latest; most of the birds arrive in Kenya by the end of October or early in November, but do not reach Griqualand, South Africa until early December. The bird seems to leave the latter region about the first of February, and large flocks appear in Kenya in March, but it is late April, or early May, before they arrive in central Europe. On the basis of arrival dates, Stresemann figured that the 2120 miles separating Cairo from Kenya were covered in 55 days at an average of 39 miles a day; the 2240 miles from Kenya to Griqualand required 50 days, an average of 45 miles a day. During spring migration the first stage trip takes 35 days, an average of 64 miles a day, and the final stage only 30 days, or 71 miles a day. It is evident that these are approximate figures based on the arrival dates of a whole flock rather than on observation of specific birds. Furthermore, they assume that birds fly in a straight line, whereas they actually do nothing of the kind. Detours lengthen the route, so the distance flown daily is probably greater than these figures indicate.'

In earlier days migrants were thought to travel at enormous heights. It was argued that low pressure at great altitudes helps the bird in its flight and that from such heights they could see much farther. However, thanks to the modern instruments and diligent observers it has

been found that majority of the birds prefer to fly not above 6000 ft. Many small birds fly under 200 feet while some others just above the waves. But there are birds which travel at much higher altitudes even when there is no mountain barriers or plateaux. A mallard, for instance, got killed by an aircraft at the height of four miles. Apparently the birds adapt themselves to the local conditions and choose the optimum elevation according to the wind direction. Also the nature of the terrain influences the choice of altitudes. With many exceptions, the land birds fly higher above the sea than over the land while the sea birds behave in the opposite way.

Although the primary direction of migration is not affected, the local migration routes are to some extent influenced by the wind. However, it depends upon the species, nature of the country, and the velocity of the wind. Several species have been noted to fly against the wind rather than follow it which would enable a faster flight. This behaviour has been attributed to the thermal conditions: migrants prefer the warmth carried by the wind, to the movement of the air.

The wind has a limited influence especially when the geographical features are well defined. For example, when an island is on the route the birds go straight to it unmindful of the adverse winds. However, if the wind is very powerful the birds tend to fly against it, and if too intense, stop the journey temporarily.

Many birds use the rising air currents for migratory flights. The terrestrial gliding birds are often noted to wait till late in the morning for the thermal currents to rise upwards. They then soar in spirals and drift away slowly in a straight line without beating their wings.

Migrants exploit the wind to the full so as to cover the maximum distance using the minimum energy. But storms have catastrophic effects on them. While many are carried far out of their normal routes, millions perish unable to withstand the gale.

Besides wind, the other weather conditions such as sun and rain, heat and cold, snowfalls and variations in atmospheric pressure influence the migrants. Experiments have been done in various parts of the globe to prove this. Since the birds respond to meteorological conditions, the behaviour of migrants at least in some cases can foretell a change in the weather in northern countries. In fall and winter, certain northern birds like geese and swans herald the cold. When a cold wave strikes Europe, even before instruments could record it, they move farther south. In spring migrants may indicate the approach of fine weather. But a large section of the birds arrive and depart independent of the weather conditions. These birds sometimes get killed in large numbers due to adverse weather like snow storms. But the set patterns of their behaviour do not change.

(To be continued)

BIRDS ON THE MANAS RIVER

Zafar Futehally

The Manas river separates India from Bhutan and there could be no more beautiful boundary line than its shimmering icy-clear water, calm as a lake for long stretches, and then cascading over shingle and white boulders. The banks are protected by the tallest trees and the mountains in the background are so richly forested that not a patch of bare land is visible anywhere.

This is the place where I had my first view of the Eastern Merganser (Mergus merganser orientalis) in late February this year. A group of half a dozen were swimming through the water, half submerged in cormorant fashion, and when they landed on the bank their long slender red bills, most unducklike, and hooked at the tip, and their red legs revealed their identity. While the general colours of the females are brown, white and grey, the males stand out by their glossy greenish black head, black primaries and white body and wings. Every few minutes they went on a fishing expedition, swimming swiftly across the rippling waters. They hunt in cooperation driving fish in the placid areas near the banks where the quarry is more easily seized. Salim Ali says that Little Egrets take advantage of this situation and place themselves in the shallow water near the banks ready to pounce on the fish driven ahead by the pursuing Mergansers. Unfortunately there were no egrets around when we were there to provide us with this entertainment.

I got into a boat in an effort to get near the birds for photography, but they were somewhat wary and would not allow a close approach. They were less apprehensive of a local man collecting drift-wood very close to them, but 'civilized' visitors could not be trusted.

Another interesting species of which we saw quite a lot during our visit was the Greyheaded Fishing Eagle (Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus). A pair was usually seen sitting by their nest on a tall Salmalia tree (as the books say they should), or circling lazily over the river. This is a predominantly fish-eating bird and the fish is captured from near the surface of water in its talons. During the breeding season the birds feed their young also on small mammals and birds, and evidence of Junglefowl and Squirrels have been found from their nests.

The Fishing Eagle is widely distributed through India right down to Kerala. In fact there is a separate race of this species in Ceylon (plumbeiceps). The Tamil name of the bird is Vidai Ali, and the common English name, the Tank Eagle. According to G. M. Henry when masses of fish gasp in the drying tanks in Ceylon the eagle gets an easy meal.

In consonance with the environment around Manas, all the birds appeared to be exquisitely beautiful and there were too many even to be named. Nearer Gauhati when we reached the plains and less spectacular scenery, less elegant creatures came into view. There were large numbers of Lesser Adjutant Storks (Leptoptilos javanicus) looking for frogs, fish and reptiles in the wet areas around the fields. Sometimes

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their heads and necks completely disappeared from view as they bent down to reach their food. They are efficient scavengers and render great service by feeding on garbage and carcasses on the outskirts of villages and towns.

Review

The Vanishing Jungle: The Story of the World Wildlife Fund Expeditions to Pakistan, by Guy Mountfort. 236 pages; 90 black-and-white plates; 26 colour plates; 6 line illustrations; 2 end maps; 4 appendices; Selected Bibliography and Index. Collins, London 1969. Price 63s net.

Like the author's trilogy, Portrait of a Wilderness; Portrait of a River; and Portrait of a Desert; which deal, respectively, with his expeditions to the Coto Dorado in Spain; the Danube Basin; and Jordan; this is a well-produced, lavishly illustrated and altogether most attractive book, written in Guy Mountfort's easy, pleasing style about his two expeditions to Pakistan in 1966 and 1967.

An excellent foreword is provided by H.R.H. The Prince of the Netherlands who is President of the World Wildlife Fund.

Most of the photographs, both black-and-white and coloured, are by that celebrated wildlife photographer Eric Hosking, who has collaborated with the author on all his expeditions and whose photographs add so greatly to the attraction of his books. As a whole, they are excellent, considering the great difficulties under which they were often taken.

The line illustrations by Penelope Gillespie make a pleasing contribution to the charm of the book.

The two end maps -- of West Pakistan and the other of East Pakistan -- are most useful, though could perhaps be a little more detailed. Each is, in effect, two maps, one indicating Elevation and the other the Distribution of Climatic Forest Types. Both give, in common, the usual geographical features, location of towns, national boundaries, etc.; together with the recommended National Parks and Wildlife Reserves.

Appendices A, B and C respectively list the 99 species of Mammals; 45 species of Reptiles and Amphibians; and the 423 species of Birds observed during the expeditions.

Appendix D is a note by Eric Hosking on the photographic aspect of the work of the expeditions.

The Selected Bibliography is extensive, useful and makes interesting reading, but which could, without a good deal of self-restraint, prove very expensive reading.

The Index, a very important feature of a book such as this, appears to be comprehensive and accurate.

The splendid line illustration of a tiger embossed in gold on the front cover adds an attractive touch.

Some twenty-five years ago Pakistan was teeming with wildlife and

was in fact a naturalist's paradise, but since then both the animals and their habitats have suffered severe diminution. Forests have been cut down, swamps drained, roads, railways, airports and new towns have been built. Hunting, trapping and poisoning of wild animals have increased alarmingly.

The extent of the losses was unknown and there appeared to be no ready and reliable way of finding out.

The World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature were anxious to gain information and, in consequence, the former organisation sponsored the two expeditions which were made by Guy Mountfort and his party in 1966 and 1967 to establish the facts.

The credit for the idea that the author and his team should visit Pakistan, prompted no doubt by the splendid work of a similar nature performed by the author and his collaborators in Jordan in 1963 and 1965, has to be given to Naser-ud-Deen-Khan and Christopher Savage, who is a member of our readership and a contributor to the Newsletter.

The then President, Ayub Khan, took a personal interest in the expeditions and gave them his personal support and encouragement and took active steps to implement the recommendations which were made.

The book analyses the consequences of man's influence on nature throughout the varied habitats of Pakistan. It is the first authoritative account of the status of Pakistan's wildlife and most effectively illustrates the kind of work in which the World Wildlife Fund is engaged.

Pakistan has some of the world's greatest mountains, rivers, deserts and forests and the teams in their travels of some 15,000 miles by Land Rover, air (including helicopter), rail, launch, dug-out canoe and elephant encountered these from the snow-clad Himalayas and the arid Sind Desert to the Sunderbans and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The expeditions found that the losses of some animal species and primary vegetation were worse than was feared and some animals were extinct and others on the verge of being so. The Blackbuck and Chinkara were particularly badly hit. However, as the result of the recommendations made and the urgency with which they are being implemented by the governments of both West and East Pakistan, there are good prospects that many threatened species will now survive.

The work of the expeditions had far-reaching results: 2 National Parks and 8 Wildlife Reserves have been established, legislation has been introduced to protect endangered species and programmes of conservation and education have been launched. The recommendations also included the formation of a government committee to deal with wildlife problems; changes in the administrative structure affecting conservation; a ban on the export of skins of wild animals; changes in the hunting regulations; and the introduction of training in wildlife management at certain universities.

It was most gratifying to read that the recommendations were accepted by all concerned with great goodwill and that immediate action was taken for their implementation.

In his preface, the author says, 'To-day the rich natural heritage of Pakistan is on the road to survival and the Government fully deserves the added lustre which this will bring to its prestige at home and abroad'.

This then is a fascinating, but sad story with a happy ending.

S. K. Reeves
Bookham, Surrey, U.K.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Alarming reports continue to come in from all parts of the world about damage to bird life by pesticides, oil pollution and by thoughtless human action in many ways.

The Smithsonian Institution's Center for Shortlived Phenomena, U.S.A. has organized an efficient system about reporting dead as well as oiled birds from all parts of the world. Hardly a week passes without reports of serious damage.

The Observer of 26 October 1969 refers to the situation in Britain thus:

' BIRDS: Prepare for disaster

Thousands of dead sea birds were washed on to the shores of Britain. A week later, someone realised there had been a major environmental disaster. After a further week, one bird had been analysed, but only for a few chemical pollutants. After yet a further week, a dozen birds had been studied to test a few other theories, and the Government, at last, called some experts together. Meanwhile, any further evidence they might need to solve this mystery has been rotting on the beaches. So we may never know what happened.

This kind of detective work is, in any case, not easy. Each possible cause must be researched separately -- at considerable cost in time and money. But it is no help that the whole investigation has, until now, had to depend on the efforts of amateur bodies, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and whatever friendly contacts they may happen to have with a few laboratories. It is astounding but true that until last Friday's meeting of the experts, every Minister and official washed his hands of the affair.

Disasters like this, which might possibly affect people as well as animals, will happen again. Next time, we must move more rapidly. What we need is some kind of national environmental research unit, presumably under Mr Anthony Crosland's new Ministry, that could collect the evidence quickly, co-ordinate the detective work, and have access to suitable laboratories as of right. '

CORRESPONDENCE

' Early Rising of the Indian House Crow '

To S. Sen Gupt's note on the above I wish to observe that the Bombay house crow (like quite a few humans) sleeps restlessly on brightly moonlit nights. I have time and again noticed this cawing on waking at 2 or 3 o'clock on such nights from crows that are normally quite still.

During the day crows feregather at times and make an awful noise. I have not often been successful on tracing the cause. It might, for instance, be a snake. But on several occasions the intruder objected to was an owl. Crows are very jealous of their territory and do their best to drive off an intruder. At the Bombay Race Course one often sees a pair of crows attacking a kite perched on a pole and driving it away. Once as I approached a tree on which a crow's nest contained fledglings, one of the parents attacked me and pecked me on the head.

Amin M. Tyabji

5-C, Somerset Place, Bombay 26

An Excursion to Roorkee

I went birdwatching with that well-known ornithologist, Dr Joseph George. We first went to a scrub jungle on the way to the river and saw a solitary Starling (Sturnus vulgaris), the first Starling I have ever seen.

Then we sighted a Longtailed Buzzard (Buteo rufinus). We also saw a Lesser Whitethroat (Sylvia curruca) among the bushes.

Master Ramachandra Guha

Aged 11 years, The Doon School
Dehra Dun

' Birdwatching at Surat and Baroda '

In a recent Newsletter (Vol. 10(3): 13) I could not help noticing that the last contributor Vipin Parikh who describes Birdwatching at Surat and Baroda goes on to describe the sighting of a ' Spotted Sandpiper ', Red Shank, and the Green Shank. Of course the former would be really exciting because Actitis macularia, the Spotted Sandpiper though common in North America has never been recorded in the Sub-continent as far as I am aware. May be the author meant the Spotted Redshank. Anyway we should encourage accuracy in our recorded observations even amongst neophytes.

T. J. Roberts

Roberts Cotton Associates Ltd
Khanewal, W. Pakistan

[Vipin Parikh obviously referred to Tringa glareola which is known as the Spotted or Wood Sandpiper in these parts of the world.

How confusing trivial names are? Roberts refers to Actitis macularia (synonymous with Tringa macularia). - Ed./

Pinkheaded Duck in Bharatpur

I invite your kind attention to the reported occurrence of the Pinkheaded Duck at Bharatpur during 1958. It is mentioned by Mr Jack Denton Scott in his book Forests of the Night, p. 157 (Jaico Shikar Series, 1959). The relevant passage reads: '..... and strange types later identified for me by the Maharaja (of Bharatpur!): Whistling ducks, Andaman Teal, Pinkheaded ducks.....'

I think the reference is to the Redcrested Pochard.

K. S. R. Krishna Raju
Gilbert White Memorial Amateur Nature
Study Club, Alamanda R.S.
Visakha Dist., Andhra Pradesh

[I agree with you that the reference is to the Redcrested Pochard. There is very little evidence of the Pinkheaded Duck now existing.
-- Ed./

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BIRDS ON A KASHMIR HOLIDAY

Shama Futehally

At the time of writing this, we have spent the first half of May in Kashmir, the time divided between Srinagar, Gulmarg and Pahelgam. As in most new places, our birdwatching has been wary and slightly apologetic, and our lists are full of question marks in pencil.

While in the houseboat on Dal Lake, the two commonest birds were perhaps the Whitecheeked Bulbuls and the Common Kingfisher. The bulbuls were quite at home on the various stumps sticking out of the water and the stunted trees on small islands in the lake. The kingfishers were amazing, there were hundred of them, darting into the water from time to time and often close to where we were. On the wires overhead we often saw a Pied Kingfisher or two, and once were lucky enough to see one hovering. The other bird which was always around was the Great Reed Warbler, whose hearty disapproving cackle followed us wherever we went on the lake, but we only saw this elusive species once. Some readers will remember a common walk taken two or three years ago behind Juhu, where the Great Reed Warbler (heard) was perhaps the highlight of the morning. The only tern we saw was the Whiskered Tern, in small groups, and there were many Blackeared Kites. On one occasion we saw a solitary Little Bittern among the reeds. My father also hear the Whitebreasted Kingfisher.

A walk up the Takht-e-Sulaiman hills which overlooks the lake, revealed species closer to home. We saw a Collared Bushchat and many Rufousbacked Shrikes, and at least twice the Blue Rock Thrush, sitting on a rock like a mounted bird and paying us no attention whatsoever, except of course when my father took out his camera, and it flew neatly out of sight. There were many Ring Doves, Hoopoes and Common Swallows.

On a day's outing to Dachigam sanctuary, we found many thrilling birds on the most casual little walk along a stream. Among them were Hodgson's Rosefinch, a Blueheaded Rock Thrush, white-eyes, and one bird I couldn't identify which was some kind of finch perhaps, a small handsome bird with bright yellow underparts, black head and wings, and I think a black beak. White streaks on the wings. Perhaps this was a Himalayan Greenfinch. Dachigam was the only place perhaps where we did not see Hodgson's Pied Wagtail, which was very common everywhere else, near water as well as away from it. The rocky stream harboured another species we were to see again many times, that was the Plumbeous Redstart. We also saw the female and hastily mistook it for a Forktail. However we have not seen a real Forktail yet, which is disappointing. A little higher up we saw many Himalayan Black Bulbuls, one or two of them singing like mad. Again we here made our first acquaintance with the Cinammon Tree Sparrow, which we were to see again wherever we went, and for the first time heard the Asiatic Cuckoo. It was, at first, faintly astonishing to hear the sound coming out of a tree rather than a cuckoo clock.

One bird I should have mentioned in connection with Srinagar was about the size of a sparrow, with dull brown-grey upperparts, and pale buff underparts, and a conspicuously ruffled white throat. This description is unscientific, but although there were many individuals on that little tree and we craned our necks, the light was very bad and probably deceptive. Lesser Whitethroat? It would be a very heavy question mark indeed.

A little outside Srinagar, in the Hokra Bird Sanctuary, there were many many Tickell's Thrushes, clumsy and babbler-like, Indian Tits, nesting on the ceiling of the forest hut, and Starlings. The sanctuary includes a big lake, and with the most perfunctory sweep of the binoculars we picked out Grey Herons, Blackwinged Stilts, Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, and a Golden Plover. There was a vast tempting patch of duck just too far away to be seen properly.

Gulmarg was very cold but full of good things. The most common were the Simla Black Tits, and a pair of Kestrels just below the hill where our guest-house was situated. More than once we saw the West Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, with its black-and-white body and crimson cap. we were, very thrilled by the Eastern Meadow Bunting - rusty upperparts streaked with black, black-and-white streaked head, white throat and rusty underparts - though Salim Ali (Indian Hill Birds) calls this 'one of the commonest birds in Kashmir'. We often saw the Himalayan Whistling Thrush, and the Whitecapped Redstart. We took one particularly delightful walk along a canal in the pine forests, where we saw again and again the Kashmir Slaty Blue Flycatcher, generally whiskered and mischievous, and several times the Large Crowned

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Willow Warbler. Then there were all those small brown distressing things which generally elude most birdwatchers and certainly always elude us.

We have been in Pahalgam two days only, and so far seen just Red-breasted Flycatchers and one Himalayan Griffin, circling at Aru, about ten miles from Pahalgam.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE COMMON INDIAN WEAVER BIRDS AND THEIR NESTS

A. Navarro, S.J.

The Indian Weaver Bird is one of the few Indian birds that has been more studied and observed by ornithologists and have captivated not only the admiration of the birdwatchers but also of casual and independent bird admirers. In view of this, I presume I will not be able to put on record anything that has not been said or observed before. It is only the occasion that motivated my interest in writing a few lines on this subject. At the very outset I feel I must emphasize the term occasion; for, I consider myself very fortunate at having the chance to witness the construction of several weaver birds' nests at such close quarters, that simply by the mere stretching of my arms I could touch some of the nests and look in and out of the weaving process.

The occasion offered itself to me during the days from September 16 to September 29, 1969, when I was staying at De Nobili College, on the Ahmednagar Road, in Poona; the building is large, with two central patios and an addition of four small rectangular patios. They are all furnished with nice gardens, which include a few accacia trees in each patio.

From the very first day of my stay there, at sunrise, I noticed that the small patios were full of life as if there were small colonies of sparrows settled in each patio; what attracted my attention was the fact that in the midst of the chit-chat of the sparrows chattering, at very short intervals, a very loud and prolonged chee-ee shrill sound could be heard, constantly floating on the air. Peeping from a window, I discovered that each patio had a small colony of three to four male weavers busily building their well-known bottle-nest. Most of the nests had just been started and the sharp chee-ee sounds of the birds could be heard throughout the day.

One day, from the very early hours of the morning I noticed that a male weaver was very excited and his shrill chee-ee sounds were louder and more frequent giving the semblance of a challenge to a full army of opponents. There was no nest yet; he was flying at short and nervous flights, all the time around a particular spot; it took me quite some time to discover the real meaning of such fussy behaviour; there was no doubt that he had selected the spot where he wanted to build his nest and he was loudly proclaiming to the whole world the right of ownership of the chosen spot; in other words, staking his claim. I, therefore, came to the conclusion that the chee-ee shrills had taken the place of what the ornithologists call 'the territorial

song'. The next day I noticed a long oval loop hanging from the selected spot; this loop is not only the starting point of the nest, but it seems to be that the whole shape of the nest depends entirely on the shape of the loop; the loop, if from the very beginning has a long, oval shape, then the weaver will produce a long and elongated nest; if the original loop is of the broader variety, then the nest too will be broad and short, and may even assume a distorted shape or totally out of proportion to the typical long bottle-nest.



Fig. 1. The loop is the starting point of the Weaver's nest and the whole support of the nest

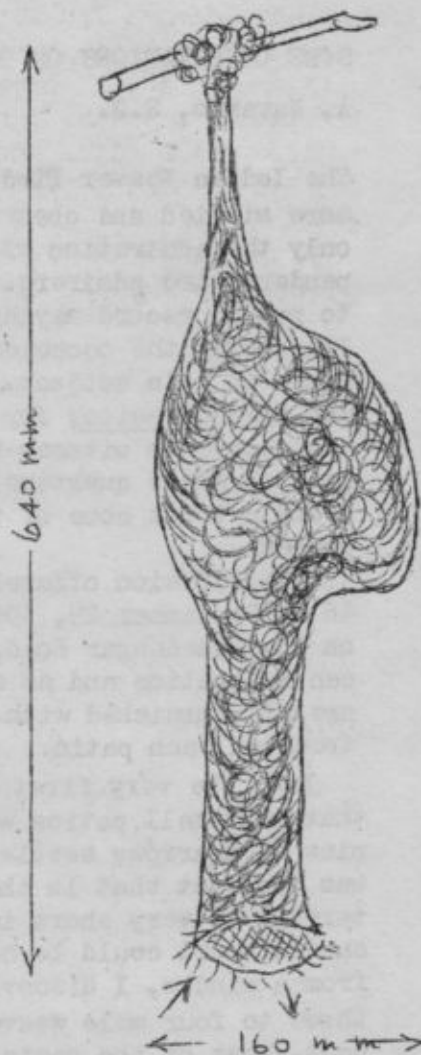


Fig. 2. Standard female nest

The loop is like a trapeze whence the weaver will perch, sometimes upwards and at other times downwards; thence he will stretch and twist his body to any angle or direction as required to weave the nest; this results in the performance of a variety of acrobatic feats and movements, resulting finally in the production of his masterpiece. First the loop is reinforced and the ceiling or roof is built up; then comes the middle portion; at this point the 'tube' is begun;

and finally, the closing of the upper part of the nest from the outside; and then the 'tube' is completed. At the commencement of operations, the nests are given, but soon the colour fades; the final shade depends on the materials selected!

Some time ago at Versova I noticed nests that remained green for a very long time. But the weavers I was observing used to bring the grass strips from the grass that was growing abundantly in the nearby surroundings. The first material was rather coarse, but as the construction work advanced, the strips became longer and thinner. Some ornithologists, who have studied the weaver habits, say that the strips are prepared by the birds, cutting with their beaks, a notch on the inside of the blade and tearing it off. To my great surprise, I noticed that a weaver, now and then, would bring four to five strips together; and after long observation I discovered that the weaver, having cut the grass blade into three or four strips, would cut the blade at just the point where the strips commenced and from this point it fixed the blade into the nest and started weaving each individual strip, as if the strips had been brought independently of the others.

The weavers on approaching their nest would be very noisy and would end with their typical shrill chee-ee. There was a lot of quarrelling and acts of mischief in the colonies, certainly not without reason; I did often observe that some weavers were interfering in their neighbours' affairs, going so far as to steal material from other nests.

It is rather curious to note that birds behave quite differently under the same pattern of circumstances. Now and then some weavers, at the time of arrival at their nests, with their grass strips, would drop these strips, may be perhaps through pure accident or due to the quarrelsome atmosphere that prevails at the moment, amongst the builders.

The real fact was that the nests in this colony were being built too close to each other; sometimes a fallen strip, before it reached the ground, would perhaps be caught or entangled on a lower branch; one of the builders would pick this up and the other weavers never made any attempt to retrieve the fallen materials.

In one of these small colonies, there were four nests; three of them were at the beginning of the building process, while the fourth had already been finished; the builders of the nests were in no way interested in the finished nest; I, therefore, first thought, that the finished nest was an old one, when suddenly I saw a female weaver emerge from the nest. Here we have another example of a different behaviour; this must have been the only nest built a month ahead of the rest in the colonies. By the side of a nearby stream were several acacia trees and almost every tree contained small individual colonies, some larger than the others; the larger colonies must have had 15 to 20 nests; in all this I could not find a single nest that could have the appearances of a finished product; the chit-chat as of sparrows and the chee-ee shrills of the builders could be heard over a long distance away.

On my frequent visits to observe the breeding activities, I did not see a single female weaver. My final conclusion was that the small

colonies were small units of a large colony scattered over an area of half a square mile; while trying to survey the neighbouring areas, I could not locate a single weaver nest.

A few days later on the way to Alibaug I came across another colony of weaver birds made also on similar basis, with this difference — a large unit of forty to fifty nests and a series of small units scattered over small area along the Alibaug Road.

Some times later I had a second chance to have another look at the colony which was already abandoned by the weavers. As the nests were hanging a few feet above the ground, I had an excellent opportunity to examine each and every nest; in all there were about 50 nests. The texture and shape of most of them were so similar, it seemed as if all had been woven by a single bird; only a few were rather crude and flimsy. The most notable difference was on the tubes; some were long and thickly woven, others rather so thinly that light could be seen

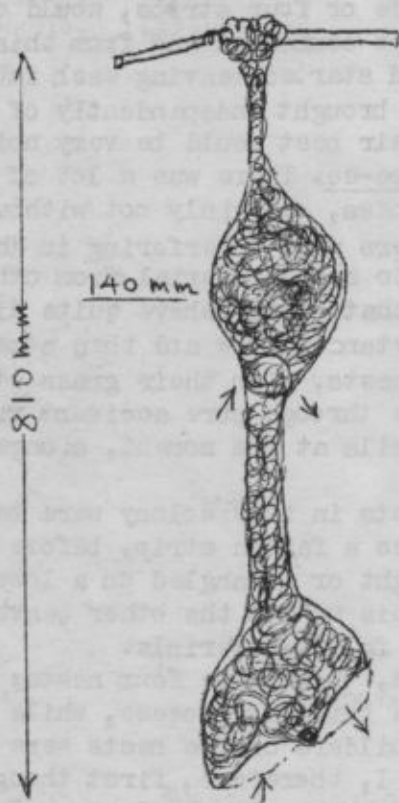


Fig. 3. Combined female and male nest - a rare coincidence

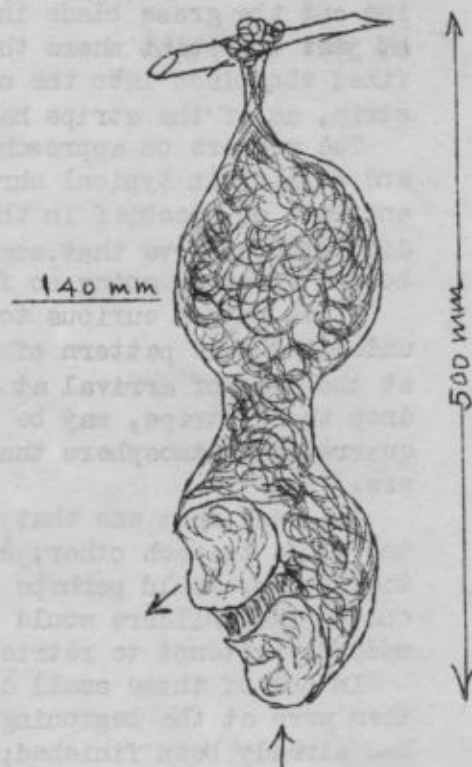


Fig. 4. A male nest that may have started as a female's nest and ended as a male nest.

through the walls of the tube; other tubes being short, had a very poor finish. We also found a few nests with the external appearance of not being finished; these nests, at the lower end of the loops were strongly reinforced and from one side of the nest there was a large, broad, round, entrance, with a lower downward exit, and that

was the 'end' of the nest. It seems that these nests are used by male weavers at the time of incubation (the female alone incubates). As there were so few nests of this type, we could conclude that each is used by several male weavers at the same time, or as the male are polygamous, a few nests suffice for the needs of the entire colony.

Last year during the October vacation I went to Bihar with three students, on a birdwatching expedition; we stayed in a tiny village called Rampur — a couple of miles from the Nepal frontier. From the very first day of our arrival we discovered a tall date-palm tree that was literally crowded with weavers' nests. The focus of our attention was on the palm tree; several times we made attempts to count the number of nests but we could never agree on the exact number;

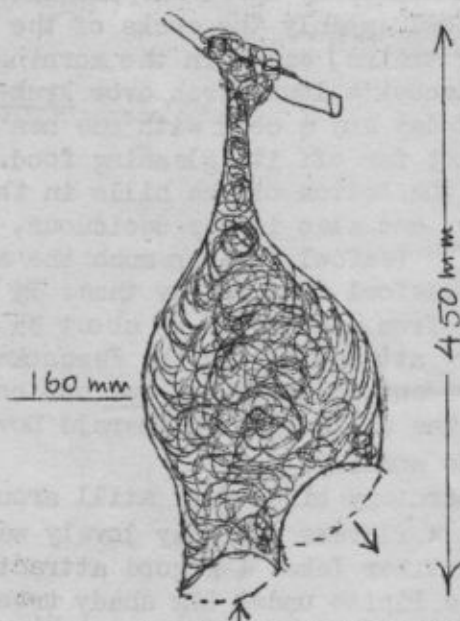


Fig. 5. Standard male nest front view

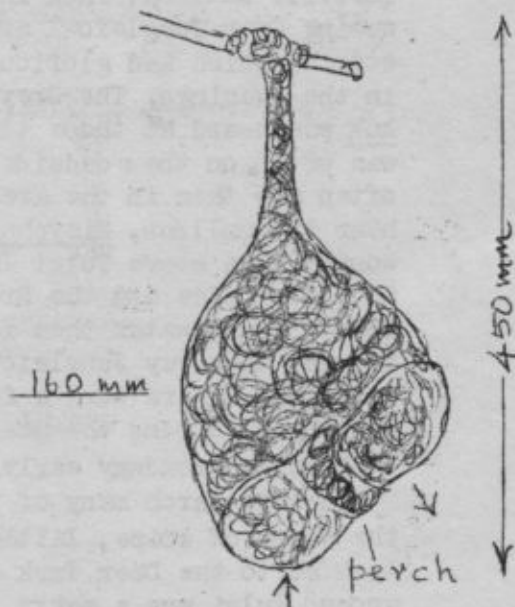


Fig. 6. Standard male nest lower view: ↗ way in; ↘ way out

nevertheless we all came to the conclusion that there were more than 200 on that one single date-palm tree; what is still more astonishing is the fact that during our entire stay at Rampur we did not see a single weaver bird.

Most of the weavers belong to the African Continent. In India we have a very small representative group comprising four different species. All the same, in my opinion we have reason to be the best weavers. A comparative study of the nests produced by their African brethren will certainly reveal this real fact.

If we examine a few of our Indian weavers' nests we will have many small details to admire. In all the nests, at the chamber where the female deposits the eggs there is always a cluster of a few pebbles of mud; among ornithologists there has been a diversity of opinion regarding the need for these pellets. We have not to overlook the main purpose of such a construction which is for the safety of nest itself, judging from the way and place where it is attached.

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The weaver's nest is nature's device of a cooling system; the mud pellets seem to be acting as insulating material to keep the whole egg at the right temperature for successful incubation. It is rather curious to note that the fame of our Indian Weaver Birds was well known in England well into the later middle ages judging from the fact that some of the old weavers' associations were giving a prominent position to the Indian Weaver Bird in their respective guilds.

OSPREY AND OTHERS AT BORIVILI NATIONAL PARK, BOMBAY

D. A. Stairmand

Borivili National Park in March and early April was excellent for seeing Grey Junglefowl and Peafowl (mainly the cocks of the latter, some of which had glorious long trains) early in the mornings or late in the evenings. The Grey Junglecock's loud harsh crow kruk-kava-kava-kuk was heard at those times of day and a cock with one hen or more was often on the roadside, or not far off it, gleaning food. I most often saw them in the areas at the bottom of the hills in the Park, near dry nullahs, Zizyphus, etc. and also in the deciduous, lightly wooded area above Tulsi Lake. The Peafowl were in much the same areas and both these and the Grey Junglefowl were fairly tame. By that I mean I could watch them feeding from a distance of about 35 yards. I thought the Grey Junglefowl very attractive and the Peacocks most beautiful. There were a few strident calls of may-awe but not nearly as many as during the monsoon. The well-coloured Emerald Doves were also on the roadway early in the morning.

In late March many of the migratory birds were still around and the wisps of snipe, Little Ringed Plovers and many lovely wagtails drew me to the Deer Park end of Vihar Lake. (A good attraction around Tulsi was a party of Tree Pipits under big shady trees near Tulsi Waterworks). One day in March I was disappointed that the party of pretty Bluethroats had apparently departed from the surrounds of Vihar Lake but was compensated by the appearance of two Ospreys over the lake as I was watching 100+ Little Cormorants fishing in concert. The Little Cormorants moved off leaving centre stage to the Ospreys and they turned on a most dramatic show by performing strictly 'according to the book'. They flew steadily over the water in wide circles about 60 feet up and would occasionally 'check' in flight upon sighting prey and then, once or twice, came a stupendous drop with closed wings, the bird hitting the water with a great and thrilling splash and disappearing for a few moments before emerging with a fish gripped firmly in its talons. As the Osprey rises from the water it gives a compulsive shrug to shake off the water from its feathers and takes its prey away to a perch to eat. The Ospreys, when with their 'catch', were often chivvied by Pariah Kites.

During three successive week-ends I noticed an Osprey either at Vihar or at Marve (where it was on a rock on the grassy flats behind Madh) with crest raised and looking upwards at the sky with slow turns of the head from side to side. Once another Osprey appeared and the

one apparently on the 'look-out' flew up to join it. But perhaps my line of thought was rather fanciful. The Osprey is easy to recognise in flight by its angled, somewhat pointed wings and 'necklace' across the upper breast.

It was on one of those March evenings at Vihar that I first noticed a Blackheaded Munia (Lonchura malacca) on the tall weeds near Vihar Lake. I assumed it was an ex-cage bird because of its extreme tameness and stupidity but I was to see one again on further visits and, more recently, I've seen a party of six Blackheaded Munias in the same spot. By the end of March all the duck had departed but some Coot were still around the grassy margins of Vihar Lake and a lone Shikra, flying fast and low, would cause panic in their ranks.

March was also a good month to watch Goldenbacked and Mahratta Woodpeckers on soft wood trees such as Salmalia and Erythrina and the Goldenbacked Woodpeckers were frequently working up, and sliding down, the trunks of Palmyra Palms. One day I watched a battle between a woodpecker and a pair of Common Mynas over a nest hole in a dead tree near the Deer Park. This woodpecker played a lone hand against the mynas although I heard another woodpecker's chattering 'laugh' close by. The woodpecker was like the common Goldenbacked Woodpecker but had a red rump and was possibly Tickell's Goldenbacked Woodpecker (Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus). The fight was prolonged and next time I visited the tree I saw no bird. While walking along a pipeline one morning I heard a very loud 'tapping' noise and found three Rufous Woodpeckers working on a carton-like nest of tree ants. I watched them for over one hour and had a marvellous view from the ground as the nest was only about 3 feet above ground level. The birds were disturbed on two occasions by a drove of cattle passing by and they then flew up onto a Silk Cotton and drank nectar from the flowers. None of the three birds had the crescent shaped crimson patch of feathers under the eye and one bird was much smaller than the other two. I occasionally saw Pigmy Woodpeckers in the Park.

To me the outstanding trees in the Park in March were the Kusims, with their new red leaves, and Corals in flower. Early morning it was possible to see Grey Hornbills, Golden Orioles, Blackheaded Orioles, Racket-tailed Drongoes and Tree Pies almost with one sweep of my binoculars. There was some mating, too. A pair of Ashy Swallow Shrikes copulated on a branch of a tree just above me while all the insouciance of a pair of hippies on Panjim beach.

The drives through Aurey on the way to Borivili National Park were memorable for the roadside avenues of trees such as Rain Trees, Rusty Shield Bearers, and best of all, the Pongams in lovely fresh lime green leaf.

Away from Borivili - while on a godown inspection at Bhandup - I listened to, and then watched, two Pied Mynas (Sturnus contra) in a Tamrind. Very fortunately, I had my binoculars with me as I was visiting the Park afterwards.

As a postscript I would like to add that on 25/iv I was pleased to see seven Spotbills dipping and resting on shallow water close in to the edge of Vihar Lake. I had not seen duck there for four weeks.

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THE STATUS OF THE SPOTTED REDSHANK, Tringa erythropus

F. M. Gauntlett

Volume 2 of the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan states that the Spotted Redshank is everywhere less common than the Redshank T. totanus. However this is certainly not the case in a particular locality in West Bengal.

For two years I have been carrying out observations of the birds of the Damodar river at the Durgapur barrage but have not yet seen a Redshank there. By contrast, the Spotted Redshank is a common winter visitor with a flock of up to 40 from January to March and smaller numbers in December and April. In fact, after Temminck's Stint, Calidris temminckii and Greenshank T. nebularia it is probably the most numerous and consistent member of the wader flocks at this spot.

It seems odd that its abundance has not been noticed elsewhere and one may conclude that in the past it has been confused with the Greenshank with which it often associates and closely resembles in winter plumage. Its habit of wading up to its belly when feeding tends to obscure its characteristic red legs, further confounding its separation from the Greenshank.

My observations have been made with 12 x 60 binoculars recently supplemented by a 60x zoom telescope.

CHANDOIA TALAO

S. K. Reeves

What nostalgic memories were evoked for me - a Gujarati born and bred -- by B. M. Shukla's article entitled, 'Visitors from abroad' in the March issue of the Newsletter.

Some years ago now, when I had the great good fortune to revisit Gujarat, I was able to pay three short visits to Chandola talao, which as I recall, lies a mile or two outside Ahmedabad on the side of the road leading to Kaira.

I can unhesitatingly support the writer's eulogy of Chandola as a birdwatching spot, and fully agree that Ahmedabad is anything but a dull place for the birdwatcher. Not only would he see a lot of birds in Ahmedabad and its environs, but also in the district within easy travelling distance of the city. If he has the opportunity to go further afield, he has Saurashtra, Kutch, the hills about Mt Abu and the Surat Dangs within reasonable reach.

My first visit to Chandola was in December and the second and third visits were in February.

On two of my visits I was lucky enough to see flamingos -- the first I had ever seen in the wild state and what an unforgettable thrill it was to see these magnificent birds with their long, protruding necks and legs and crimson plumage come flying in, circle once or twice and then settle in the shallows of the talao. For one disappointing moment I thought they would pass on and that I would

not see them again, but they stayed and I relished every moment of the treat they afforded me. There were seven altogether — two adults and five juveniles. On the next occasion, I made the acquaintance of a larger company of thirteen birds; again a mixture of adults and juveniles.

During my very brief visits, I also observed 20-30 Little Cormorants; Cattle, Little and either Large or Smaller Egrets (I regret to say I failed to distinguish between these two species); 4 or 5 Brahminy Duck; 3 or 4 Pheasant-tailed Jacanas; large numbers of Sarus Cranes, Painted and Openbilled Storks; a large number of Spoonbills; 1 or 2 Blackwinged Stilts; a fair number of White Ibises and Black Ibises; 3 or 4 Grey Herons and a larger number of small waders which were too far away to identify. On one occasion, I saw 2, and possibly 4, Blacktailed Godwits and on another occasion a flock of 10-20 birds which I am sure was of this species.

One of the birds I very much enjoyed seeing here was the Great Stone Plover. On one visit I saw 1, and possibly 2, of these fine birds.

Long may Chandola, and similar talao and jheels, remain the splendid birdwatching spot I knew it to be and which it apparently still is.

REVIEW

Swann, H. Kirke. A DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH AND FOLK-NAMES OF BRITISH BIRDS, with their History, Meaning, and First Usage: and the Folk-lore, Weather-lore, Legends, etc., relating to the more familiar species. London, Witherby & Co., 1913. 266 pages. Bibliography. Republished by Gale Research Company, Detroit, Michigan, 1968. \$9.50

Like so many recent re-issues of old, long out-of-print books, this is designed for occasional consultation by the specialist or the curious, and he will probably prefer to look at it in a public library than to buy it himself. It is not for the birdwatcher whose interest is confined to the practical study of the living bird, and it would be an expensive and somewhat wasteful addition to a personal library which does not already contain a good selection of standard ornithological reference books and field guides.

As may be inferred from the title, the more matter-of-fact Indian ornithologist will not find it at all useful. Most of the names included are probably obsolete, and many of those which are still current will not be heard in India or met with in recent literature. We use scores of English names for our birds, but we use the standard present-day ones, and it is of no importance to us to know British provincial variants — to know, for instance, that a kite was at one time in parts of England called a crotch-tail, a sparrow a spadger, or a dunlin a sea-mouse or purre. It is only a shade more purposeful to learn that the name lapwing is derived from the Anglo-Saxon hleapwince, signifying 'one who turns about in running or in flight' or that the name cormorant is a broken-down version of the Latin for sea-crow, corvus marinus.

Setting those limitations aside, I am bound to admit that this is a fascinating and entertaining work. For those ornithologists whose curiosity extends beyond birds as live animals (or dead skins) to what one should perhaps call secondary or ancillary studies, such as nomenclature, birds and man (their place in legend, popular talk and literature), and the history of ornithology, its reissue will be an agreeable and satisfactory event. It is a classic reference book of its kind, and it has been unobtainable for many years. Its reappearance can only be gratefully welcomed.

It is, in its way, a book to rejoice in. Most of the five thousand or so headwords, the vulgar or dialect names used by the cottager, farmer, gamekeeper, sportsman and countryman generally in different parts of a British Isles which has now vanished for ever, are the essence of poetry: they are either superbly apt, or evocative, or beautiful, or witty, or all those things together. What could be more fitting, and charming, than bog drum for the bittern, dip ears for the little tern, or, for the common sandpiper, watery pleeps? This last bird also, one might almost believe 'answered to' the names willy-wicket, tattler, and fiddler; the whimbrel to titterel, chickereel, brame, jack curlew, and checker-bird. The avocet was variously scooper, yelper, yarwhelp, awl-bird, picarini, and butterflip; and cognate with lapwing we have the beautiful variant lipwingle. I cannot resist quoting more. The little grebe came in for more local names than most, and among the best are surely drink-a-penny, dive-dapper, diedapper, dabber, tom pudding, arsfoot and foot-in-ar-se. Again the pied wagtail was a ubiquitous popular creature, and under the entry dishwasher for this species we have the synonyms Peggy dishwasher, Molly washdish, Polly washdish, Nanny washtail, Moll washer, washerwoman, and dishlick. There is something irresistible about all this, for those who enjoy both birds and words.

Has any attempt been made, or is it now being made, to collect material of the same sort as this among the many languages and peoples of India? The field for research here would appear to be enormous. It would be a pity if nothing of the kind is done at all in any part of the country before universal literacy and educational media like wireless and television do what they have done in Britain — standardize the villager, destroy his mythology, and make his language uniform from one district to another.

R. A. Stewart Melliish

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Coming Events

This year, 1970, which is European Conservation Year, is also the year of the Second International Congress of the World Wildlife Fund, with the theme of 'ALL LIFE ON EARTH'

The Congress will be held at the Royal Garden Hotel, in Kensington, London on November 17 and 18, 1970. The speakers will include: H.R.H. The Prince of The Netherlands, H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh,

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Mr Peter Scott, Col. Neil Armstrong, and several other distinguished international figures.

The enrollment fee for attendance is £8/- and those interested may please send for the forms from the Honorary Secretary, World Wildlife Fund, Indian Appeal, Hornbill House, Bombay.

Any enquiries about the Conference may be sent to the Administration Office, International Congress, The World Wildlife Fund, 7-8 Plumtree Court, London E. C. 4.

The XVth International Ornithological Congress will be held at the Hague from 30th August to 5th September 1970. Prof. N. Tinbergen, F.R.S. is the President of the Congress, and Dr K. H. Voous, the General Secretary.

Although the deadline for registration was 1st May, persons interested in attending the Congress might get in touch with the Secretariat, c/o The Netherlands Congress Centre, 10, Churchillplein 10, The Hague, The Netherlands.

Apart from the discussions at the Congress which will be of interest to all ornithologists there are several interesting excursions with film shows and other activities which will add to the success of the occasion.

Simultaneously with this Congress there will be a meeting of the International Biological Programme, Productivity of Terrestrial Communities Section on September 7th and 8th. The aim of this meeting is to review first results of international studies on Passer as well as as up-to-date results and to discuss new developments and methods concerning the ecology, systematics and energy flow of all kinds of granivorous birds. The meeting will be an attempt to effect closer international cooperation for future investigations.

CORRESPONDENCE

Migratory birds in Mysore

In 1969-70 winter a marked decrease in the numbers and variety of wildfowl (ducks) and even migratory birds was noted by me in this part of southern Mysore. From other sportsmen I gather that indeed in India as a whole, migratory birds were seen in comparatively less numbers this year. Could you throw some light on the validity and reasons of this reduced migration this year?

K. D. Ghorpade
Bhujungtara Farm
Doddagubbi Post
Bangalore district

Common birds of Bangalore

Bangalore is teeming with Large Green Barbets. Its ringing Kor-r-r-r, kutroo, kutroo, etc. is repeated with monotonous persistency. One was seen clinging on a twig and trying to get at berries.

The Common Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans) is common. Its shrill, whistling is often heard. I have seen kites being chased away by crows with indignant caws.

The Golden Oriole was seen a couple of times.

While out on an early morning walk one morning I came across what I think to be White-eyes, but they did not give me a chance to observe the white ring round the eye.

The Coppersmith is also common. Their Tūk, tūk, tūk calls were heard.

Spotted Doves have been observed haunting the surroundings frequently.

The Hoopoe's and Black Drongo's calls often have whistles intermingled between harsh notes.

Bangalore offers excellent opportunities for birdwatching.

Master Girish Anath
(Hyderabad)

Zafar Futehally
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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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A BIRDPWATCHERS ON CARMICHAEL ROAD

Mrs Neela D'Souza

A year on Carmichael Road, in a house with a garden, has been a joy. Our bedroom window on the first floor, looking out on to the lawn and the greenhouse, the back garden and the drop down to Tardeo, has venetian blinds -- excellent cover for birdwatching. The mango tree at the back of the house, devoid of flowers these last few months and with one solitary fruit to show in April, is a favourite haunt of the Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher. His cheerful little whistle, sliding down the scale, announces the morning and he busily hops from branch to branch, showing off his little fan. He is there for a couple of hours, making sallies after insects, trying out the fence below as a perch and then returning to his established favourite -- the mango tree. He is seldom there after nine, although sitting under the tree at lunch time one day I found him back, displaying his aerial and vocal skill -- he never tires of song.

Reading through Galbraith's urbane and vastly entertaining Ambassador's Journal, I came across this observation on the birds of Delhi: '..... most obtrusive are the birds which in this non-violent land are almost totally unfrightened. They are incredibly controversial -- always denouncing each other in the most raucous and angry tones. Indian birds rarely twitter and never sing; instead they challenge and scream.' Had Galbraith wakened to the fantail flycatcher on an April morning in Carmichael Road, he would have -- in a manner of mixed metaphors -- changed his tune.

The flycatcher is not the only one who finds the mango tree desirable. The white-eye perches there too, so close that I can clearly see the little circle outlining its bright little eye from behind the blind. The white-eye is always solemn of mien and one wishes that it were more alive to the joys of April and May -- or perhaps its appearance is deceptive. The tailor bird is there every morning too; the mango tree is an established landmark on its route after which it takes off on its regular rounds. The redvented bulbul prefers the much smaller tree nearby -- name unknown; the mali proffered a totally unfamiliar Marathi name -- and is lost in the leaves except for its vivacious whistle which is particularly clear in the evening, resounding all through the garden. The first time we had a pair of red-whiskered bulbuls visit our garden they took a fancy to the bougainvilleae that climbs up the wall of the porch in front of the house and sang a delightful accompaniment to lunch. Later in April and May they were back every morning and quickly discovered the joys of the mango tree; not only do they look tidier and more festive than the redvented kind but have more verve and vivacity in their song.

April afternoons brought the golden oriole to our garden. He has established a claim to the mango tree in front of the house, perhaps because it is much leafier and he can escape observation among its branches. His liquid warbling is part of memories of April light and shade and sound; twice I caught sight of him as the afternoon wore into evening and he decided to continue his travels.

The araucaria that stands sentinel before our house began to lean to one side and the malis pronounced it dead. They were ready to cut it down but the thought of losing that year round Christmas touch made us unwilling to accept their verdict. We suggested propping it up and so the araucaria is now anchored by a stout rope. And the barbet that sits on its topmost branch continues to call with endearing monotony. In this perch the barbet is practically invisible but occasionally he visits the mango tree behind the bedroom window and allows us to watch him. The one untidy nest on the araucaria belongs to a pair of jungle crows; perhaps the alignment of the tree threw the nest off balance for we discovered a baby crow hopping around on the grass below, with a great deal of cawing and consternation from his parents who were watching the proceedings. The young chap could not fly but eluded capture nimbly; I hope he survived the cats and dogs and urchins of Carmichael Road for we lost sight of him completely.

In May the children found and rescued a black and white bird which we took to be a magpie robin; he has an injured wing and was being tormented by the crows in the garden. But he was a most reluctant captive and refused to eat anything we offered him. The wing healed well but the bird suddenly died after a couple of days. When frightened the feathers on his head stood up in a small crest which baffled us -- or was he not a magpie-robin at all?

Last year in May the peacock was a daily caller, displaying a fine sense of theatre the day after we had moved in by appearing on the roof of the house. Once he even swished his way regally into the pantry and surprised me in the midst of baking -- oh that I were a Thurbur to immortalize him like the unicorn in the garden! May mornings a year ago had the peacock courting around the greenhouse but this year he has not been coming. The peachick has grown into a teenager and accompanies her mother every morning to the courtyard to be fed by Maama. Once in my absence the children managed to catch a small peachick and imprisoned it in a cage that earlier had been inhabited by a gay parakeet, long since dead and gone. They displayed it to me with more enthusiasm than kindness and were offended to the point of swearing off talking to me when I let out the poor caged creature which had worn a bald spot on its head trying to escape its confines.

The gulmohurs on Malabar Hill are in bloom now but the gulmohur over the garden wall has just began to put out tentative spikes of green. It has been stark and bare these last few months but strangely beautiful. And very suitable for watching birds! Every detail of the barbet is clear as he tries out different perches on its bare branches. Nostalgia accompanies the growing green of the gulmohur for we shall not be here to watch its transformation into flame and gold.

MUSINGS OF A BIRD-LOVING RUSTIC

1. Destructive habit and distribution of the Blackbacked Woodpecker

K. D. Ghorpade

One of my favourite group of birds have been the Woodpeckers, always impressing me with their attractive colour-patterns, trim and elegant shapes, ever active nature and elusive habits. The manner in which they conceal themselves from the onlooker by going round to the other side of the tree-trunk instantly reminds me of the common 'blood-sucker' lizard, a favourite object for the schoolboy's catapult.

During my last visit to our estate in Yelburga taluk (Raichur dist., Mysore) in June 1969, I had to shoot a lovely male specimen of the Blackbacked Woodpecker, Carysocolaptes festivus (Boddart), at the special request of the local peasants. In any case I had one other reason for securing the bird: I had previously taken a female of this species sometime in December 1968 and needed a male to complete my collection. The farmers of this area have labelled this and other woodpeckers as troublesome pests of the coconut tree, asserting that the birds make holes into the nuts and suck the milk inside! At first I was a bit disinclined to believe this somewhat tall story but on the repeated allegation by some of the ryots that they had actually observed this destructive act with their own eyes, I resolved myself to try and figure out this interesting phenomena.

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I examined the fallen nuts and sure enough found small holes at the base of the nut near the 'eyes' or depressions (which, incidentally, are the weakest portions of the nut shell). Quite a few of the fallen, dried-up nuts had one such hole each which certainly looked like the woodpecker's handiwork to me. My next move was to try and catch the culprit at work and so for the next few days I devoted more of my time to watching the woodpecker's activities. But, to my indignation, the birds never ventured anywhere near the nuts on the trees. They confined themselves to the coconut tree-trunks and to our large mango trees only.

Although I could not find out anything further that could throw light on this destructive aspect of the woodpeckers during my sojourn in June, I will certainly try and continue my investigations on a more intensive scale during future trips to the estate in order that a solution either this way or that may be arrived at. I invite suggestions and information relating to this most curious behaviour from readers of the Newsletter, so that together we can attempt to give an explanation for this errant behaviour on the part of the mainly insectivorous woodpecker family.

My friend and fellow birdwatcher, J. P. Raghavan informs me (pers. comm.) that this destructive habit is also prevalent among the 'larger woodpeckers' in Cannanore district (Kerala). From his personal observations and from data acquired from locals in that area, it appears that certain woodpeckers have been actually seen pecking at the coconut fruits and causing the nuts to drop down some 15-20 days later after drying up. Though not considered to be serious pests of the coconut groves there, a proportion of nuts are damaged every season. Though pecking at the nuts has been definitely recorded, there is some doubt whether the woodpecker 'sucks' the coconut milk or not. In any case, we now have confirmation of this peculiar destructive habit of woodpeckers to coconut trees. Probably readers from Kerala or Tamil Nadu have come across personally or heard from others of this aberrant behaviour?

The only other species of the family Picidae that occurs in our estate and has also been branded as a destructive bird, is the Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpecker, Dinopium benghalense (Linnaeus). On going through all the available literature on woodpeckers, I did not come across any instance which mentioned the above curious phenomenon. However, certain woodpeckers have been recorded drinking flower-nectar (of the Coral tree, Erythrina sp.), and still others are named 'Sapsuckers' owing to their habit of sucking the sap of some trees. The above phenomenon also deals with this sucking mode of feeding and I feel that if this habit of drinking the coconut milk is found to be true, it is something which the woodpecker could easily accomplish. This modification in the normal feeding habit of the Blackbacked Woodpecker could well be a clever ecological adaptation; as this particular species has always seemed to prefer coconut groves and plantations as its favourite habitat. In the course of

the normal boring operations of this species in search of their insect prey, by chance one individual woodpecker may have made a hole into a drupe (nut) and instead of encountering insects, had its first taste of the highly nutritious coconut milk while feeling around with its tongue! In addition to insects and in some cases certain fruit, coconut milk would have provided this woodpecker with a very palatable and easily acquired variation in diet. All this is mainly conjecture, but not altogether an impossible hypothesis. At least, for the present we will have to ponder over this probable explanation for the Blackbacked Woodpecker's apparent folly.

The distribution and status of the Blackbacked Woodpecker, without doubt a very uncommon and local species, has still to be completely worked out for our subcontinent. George Neavoll (Newsletter 8(11): 13) in his apparent excitement, overlooked an additional sentence in the range of this woodpecker as given by Dr S. D. Ripley in his Synopsis. The complete information given by Dr Ripley under the range of the subspecies C. f. festivus is 'The Western Ghats strip from the Surat Dangs and Khandesh area in Bombay south to Kerala, east along the Satpura mountain trend through central India, north to Dehra Dun in U.P., Bihar and West Bengal. Less common on the eastern side of the Peninsula. In deciduous forest biotope, foothills and up to 4000 ft.' Mr Neavoll missed out the 'Less common on the eastern side of the Peninsula.' bit which means that his record from Medchal in northern Hyderabad district (Andhra Pradesh) is not an extension of range but only confirms the occurrence of this species in that district. Incidentally, recent records from Orissa and Nepal extend its range to those regions.

The present known distribution and status of this interesting woodpecker as per records available in published literature indicate that except for eastern and southern Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan (?), Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam, Meghalaya, NEFA, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Burma and both Pakistans, this woodpecker is locally and patchily resident in all other areas of the subcontinent, avoiding drier open country, denser/wetter evergreen forest and hills above 4000 ft, being partial to thin deciduous jungle and coconut groves.

ARRIVAL OF THE INDIAN PITTA IN BOMBAY; APPEARANCE OF THE CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE NEAR KANHERI CAVES AND OTHER NOTES

D. A. Stairmand

One of our 'monsoon' visitors, the Indian Pitta (Pitta brachyura), was observed below Kanheri Caves at 7 a.m. on 24th May. This bird was seen on a bare branch of a tree about 20 feet up. The Pitta was first of all facing me but after less than a minute turned around on the branch so that its back was on full view. It was generally overcast morning but the slight glare from the sun was behind me and, in

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in these conditions, the shining pale blue of the lower rump show up conspicuously. After making about 4 loud clear calls the bird turned to face me again and uttered a few more of its whistling calls. It then flew away. When I again passed through this area (which was thinly wooded and largely consisted of bamboo, dry nullahs and a carpet of fallen leaves) I again spotted a Pitta in a tree. This tree had considerable foliage and I lost the bird, but it called continuously for over half an hour until I left. On a third visit later in the morning a Pitta was calling the loud clear double whistle wheet-tew and being answered. I'm not absolutely sure that the answering call was also that of a Pitta as the call made in answer appeared to be slightly higher pitched and lacking some of the tone of the first caller's. There were those excellent mimics the Racket-tailed Drongos and Chloropses in the area, and the slightly different call might possibly have been an imitation call made by one of them. Or perhaps the male Pitta's call differs slightly from that of the female?

The Pitta's varied colours were beautiful; although a great mixture they blend well as invariably happens in nature. Last year I notes a Pitta about half a mile away from this area on 18th May.*

Another interesting call in the area on 24th May was that of a Muntjac (or Barking Deer). This was also loud and sounded like the bark, or perhaps loud cough, of a dog. I later saw this charming little Deer running through bamboo.

The Indian Laburnums (Cassia fistula) in flower in Ecrivili Park were quite lovely.

On the morning of 18th May I was walking on a hilly slope in well-wooded country near Karheri Caves when I chanced to look up above me to a bill on the level of the caves and noticed a bird as it alighted on a branch of a tree. I had a good view of the bird through the trees, although my position was somewhat precarious and I had to give it up after a few minutes. But during that time I saw that the bird was a Crested Hawk-Eagle (Spizaetus cirrhatus) perched upright on a bough. There was a breeze blowing its crest of long black feathers and the long slender, powerful legs made the bird look 'tall in the saddle'. After relinquishing my tenure I was unable to see the bird again. I think its occurrence in Bombay is unusual. This bird was brown above, white below with black longitudinal streaks on throat and chocolate streaks on breast as stated in Dr Salim Ali's The Book of Indian Birds, where there is an excellent illustration. The area appeared to be well suited to this handsome forest Eagle as I have frequently seen hares, peafowl, grey junglefowl and quail in the vicinity.

*Readers will recall that in 1969 a Pitta was seen at Fihim, Colaba district, Bombay on 18th May, and another on the 21st in my garden at Andheri, suburbs of Bombay. (Newsletter Vol. 9(7): 9) — Ed.

A pretty sight at Kanheri Caves was a covey of nine Bush Quail **trooping in single file over rocks. Also at Kanheri Caves I've seen several of the beautiful Yellowbacked Sunbirds and think they must have bred successfully during April/May as some of these birds resembled the female but had the chin and throat a ruby colour and I took these to be immature males.**

A wonderful occasion for me a mile or so from Khaneri Caves was when I disturbed a Barred Jungle Owlet and it flew onto a branch to be studied in full sunlight. It was a charming little bird and in the strong sunlight its bright lemon-yellow iris were brilliant. It was near its stipulated company -- Racket-tailed Drongos and Tree Pies. I hardly ever seen an owl to recognise but many previous fruitless searches were made up for that morning.

During a brief visit to the Kanheri Caves area on the evening of 26/v I was delighted to have long looks at two not so common birds, a Whitethroated Ground Thrush (is this mainly a monsoon visitor to Bombay ?) and a male Hearspeckled Woodpecker.

I was interested to note a party of seven Spotbills (Anas poecilorhyncha) on Vihar Lake between 25th April and 9th May and at least **one Osprey from early March to 16th May.**

BIRDWATCHING IN CEYLON

Prof. Dinesh Mohan

Willapathu is a famous wild life sanctuary in Ceylon, situated about 120 miles north of Colombo. It covers an area of many square miles and is well known for its leopards and other rare animals. It has a series of ponds also which are a paradise for birdwatchers. I had a good fortune to visit Ceylon during November and December 1969 and although I missed the Ceylon Leopard since I arrived at the Sanctuary slightly late in the morning towards the end of November yet I did see a good number of birds close to the ponds. A list is given below.

Blackwinged Stilt
Sandpiper
Whitenecked Stork
Ceylon Teal
Grey Heron
House Sparrow
Cattle Egret
Asiatic Golden Plover
Golden Oriole
Ceylon Black Robin
Chestnutheaded Bee-eater

Pelican
Painted Stork
Redwattled Lapwing
Garganey
Pond Heron
Openbilled Stork
Little Egret
Jaybird
Southern Magpie Robin
Ceylon Green Bee-eater
Bluetailed Bee-eater

* The Whitethroated Ground Thrush (Zoothera citreina cyanotus) is suspected to be only a monsoon visitor to Salsette area in Bombay, but the evidence available is not conclusive, and offers birdwatchers a subject for investigation. -- Ed.

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Ceylon Whitebreasted Kingfisher	Little Cormorant
Darter	Pipit
Indian Cliff Swallow	Paradise Flycatcher
Ceylon Serpent Eagle	Ceylon Hawk Eagle
Brahminy Kite	Junglefowl
Bronzewinged Pigeon	Spotted Dove
Red Turtle Dove	Ceylon Myna
Grey Hornbill	Whitebreasted Waterhen
House Crow	Jungle Crow
Crimsonbacked Woodpecker	Green Barbet

DO NETS CATCH ONLY BIRDS?

A. Navarro, S. J.

The Spanish newspaper Carta de Espana in its March number 123 of the current year carried a novel announcement in its T.V. section. We find there an article entitled FROM A BEADLE TO A MILLIONAIRE, a title that looks more like a riddle or a quiz!

The Spanish T.V. conducts weekly competitions on various subjects. The subject is selected by any individual and is open to all; a prize to the tune of a million pesetas is offered to the one who fulfills the conditions of the competitions; in this case, to the one who answers correctly all the questions that go to form the basis of the competition.

On one such occasion the subject was THE INDIGENOUS BIRDS OF SPAIN. Once the subject was announced, the Spanish T.V. invited the public to send in questions; seventy were collected; in the first round the condition stated that competitors who answered these with less than SIX errors would qualify for the final test, at which the competitors would have to answer TEN questions more. The caption for this final test reads, IAS DIEZ DE ULTIMAS, a technical phrase which translated would mean that the competitor who answers ' the last ten questions without any error gets the million pesetas '. As luck would have it Mr S. Gallego Trigo topped the list and qualified for the prize money; there is the answer to the riddle of the newspaper title: for Mr Trigo is ' The Beadle of Barcelona University '.

What is more, this Mr Trigo has been collecting prize money at practically every competition; not that he comes with a full correct solution every time; but the rules of the competition include a clause for a certain percent cut for every error. Over and above this prize money, the Spanish Government granted him the decoration of The Cross of Alfonso X at the hands of the Prince Don Juan Carlos, on which occasion he was appointed Curator of the Zoological Museum of Barcelona University.

Close on the heels of these laurels came his membership to the Madrid Ornithological Society and he was also presented with the gold medallion of the Society; and, of course, with these honours

come responsibilities: he is now flooded with invitations to give talks in Spain and in some of the Latin American countries.

Reports in the Spanish press make us believe that he is a qualified BIRDWATCHER and a true lover of birds; for, I believe, he has never, to this day, used firearms; if in doubt about the identity of a particular bird, his last resort is the NET; and once sure of the identity of the bird, it is released; this goes to prove that he is a fervent and an active conservationist.

On being questioned by the press reporters at a press conference about his abilities and when and how this hobby started, he made a simple matter of fact statement saying his father taught him where to look for birds and how to study and classify them.

Mr Trigo is fully convinced that only the doctrine of conservation will save what little is left from the ruthless destruction indulged in by our ancestors. He is of the opinion that there is still time to save what we have inherited, provided the principles of conservation are applied fully and without exception.

CALLS OF THE PEAFOWL

Indra Kumar Sharma

The calls of birds are an expression of their internal feelings. The voices of some birds are highly developed and express their various moods. The calls of Peacocks are often quite sweet but sometimes they appear harsh and bitter, and indicate some calamity. Very little attention seems to have been paid to this subject by Indian ornithologists, Whistler, Dharmakumarsinhji, Salim Ali and others.

I have tried my best to represent the call notes as faithfully as possible but of course it is difficult to render them phonetically. I studied the calls on several typical habitats around Jodhpur within a radius of 15 km. I am now enumerating the various types of calls which I had occasion to observe.

Puzzle Call: When a peacock feels solitary and puzzled it calls Meeeo one to three times. Whilst doing so it stretches its neck upwards opening its beak widely with violent jerks of its neck.

Joyous Calls: When the bird feels happy after satisfying its hunger or finding itself in a pleasant situation it gives a single call Meeao.

Alarm Call: Two types of alarm calls were observed. It calls quak...miao when an enemy or danger is sensed in the distance. This call is also used to alert its companions. When an enemy is sighted it calls dhenku....meeeao....meeao.... and on hearing this the other birds respond with a cautious call meeao. It was noticed that after these calls all the birds become very cautious.

Escape Call: When an enemy is nearby peafowl fly up immediately calling Ka....kk.k..

Nuptial Call: When peacocks get excited on seeing a peahen nearby they give a loud nuptial call Meeaaaoooo..... which is accompanied with violent jerks of the neck. This call and movement seem to have a positive effect on the females which come near the male and induce him to commence his well-known dance.

Sigh Call: When a dancing peacock finds that the peahen is moving away he utters a sigh call Kenk.....kenk....

Fear Call: Whenever there is a loud bang of a gun or thunder all the peafowl of that area call Meeao....meao..meao 5 or 7 times with a gradual lowering of the pitch.

I observed that peacocks have several other kinds of calls as for instance when a bird has strayed apart from its companions and wants to rejoin them; there are special types of calls in the morning and when they are at the roost. The birds do not usually call during midday unless there are some very exciting circumstances. There is a common belief among people that dark clouds excite peacocks. This is probably due to the fear of impending thunder. I noticed that young peacocks call more actively than adults. New-born young chicks also call continuously peeyu.

I find that the calls of the male birds are more melodious than those of the females. In winter the birds call much less often than they do in summer. The number of calls was found to be less in winter, increasing in spring. In summer the numbers of calls decreased again, and increased in the rainy season.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Readers may have noticed some correspondence in the press recently about illegal serving of partridge and quail in restaurants and private homes. It is regrettable that with the passage of Bombay Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1951, which made it illegal for birds to be served at table (except those which have been legitimately shot by a sportsman under a game licence) a large trade in Painted and Grey Partridge and Quail continues to flourish in Bombay. The largest damage to wild birds is caused by netting carried out by Bhansipardas who get a fancy price for the birds they catch. The birds are mercilessly huddled in chicken baskets and transported over large distances by train and bus, many of them dying on the way. Will our readers kindly cooperate and inform likely breakers of the law about the existence of this Act, and also pointing out that the maximum penalty is Rs500/-, or jail for six months. Recently an offence under this Act committed by a hotel in Bandra (Bombay) was compounded for Rs500/-.

The humble House Sparrow appears to have created a stir in Australia. Apparently two or three birds managed to get to that Continent on a plane or a steamer, and the Australian Government recalling the population explosion of these birds in the United States offered a large

sum to any one who caught the birds dead or alive.

It is well known that exotic species tend to create havoc in a new environment and the panic of the Australian Government is understandable.

CORRESPONDENCE

Arrival and departure of Birds

At the edge of the forest in West Bank of Vihar Lake I saw two Pied Crested Cuckoo perched and calling and flying away later on. Also at the same spot one pair of Brahminy Myna and one Rosy Pastor was observed settling on a tree but returning later to feed on ground. As I proceeded a few steps further, a group of about fifty birds in pink and black flew away, possibly being aware of my presence. Presumably this group consisted of Rosy Pastors.

The date of observation was 31st May and time was about 6.30 p.m. Monsoon arrived in Bombay on the 28th May.

G. De

Indian Institute of Technology
Bombay 76

Birds around Bharat Scouts & Guides campsite at Jogeshwari, Bombay

I read with interest Mr S. V. Nilakanth's article on the Coucal or Crow-Pheasant in the May issue of the Newsletter.

I was more interested because this particular bird is very common at our campsite at Byram Bug, Jogeshwari, and I am surprised that many of our boys and girls do not know such common birds.

The other common birds at our campsite are the Jungle Babblers, Magpie Robins, Redvented Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Owls, Golden Oriole and Iora. The last bird has been very difficult to observe and so I rejoiced listening to its sweet call only.

I was in camp for eleven days last month conducting a training course for Scoutmasters and the Magpie Robins were the first to rouse us at 5.30 in the morning. They kept up their mating call just behind our tent till 6 a.m. and even we tape recorded it once.

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WOODPECKERS: FRIENDS or FOES?

K. K. Neelakantan

Mr K. D. Ghorpade who wrote on the Blackbacked Woodpecker in the July 1970 issue of the Newsletter seems to have made up his mind regarding the culpability of the woodpecker on very inadequate evidence. The nature of his approach to the problem is well revealed by the passage: 'My next move was to try and catch the culprit at work and so for the next few days I devoted more of my time to watching the woodpecker's activities. But, to my indignation, the birds never ventured anywhere near the nuts on the trees.' (Why 'culprit'?, Why 'indignation'?) He says that pecking at the nuts has been 'definitely recorded' by his friend and finds these 'personal observations and ... data acquired from locals' is 'confirmation of this peculiar destructive habit of woodpeckers to coconut trees.'

My own acquaintance with the Blackbacked Woodpecker was too short to permit me to undertake a defence of this species; but I know the Lesser Goldenbacked well enough to say that it does not bore holes in coconuts at any stage of their growth. I have seen it eating ripe mango, cashew and papaya fruits, though, except in the case of cashew fruit, I think it chooses fruits that have already been opened by crows, bulbuls or squirrels. I have seen it pecking at the rind of jack fruits to get at insects; but during the past 30 years I have never once seen a woodpecker on a fruit of the coconut tree. The

Goldenbacked Woodpecker is a regular visitor to the crowns of coconut trees and spends much time probing the recesses between the fronds, pulling out and flinging down large masses of decayed fibrous material and finding plenty to eat. By feeding on the beetles and their grubs, as well as by removing large quantities of the decomposed fibre amidst which these pests hide and breed, the woodpecker renders very valuable service to the trees and their owners.

The views and 'observations' of our villagers and farmers are seldom of any value. Considering the difficulties involved in following a woodpecker's movements among the fronds, flower-heads and bunches of nuts that crown a coconut tree, there is no point in accepting the sweeping statements made by rustics or even amateur naturalists. However, I have never heard any one accusing any species of woodpecker of harming coconuts. The story commonly heard in various parts of Kerala is that tender coconuts are 'bitten' by the ratsnake. Villagers believe that the ratsnake bores a hole in the nut and drinks the sweet fluid (coconut-water). But they also believe that this snake 'milks' cows and can enter the human ear tail first!

I do not know what made Mr Ghorpade think that the holes in the fallen, dried-up nuts were made by woodpeckers. I have examined quite a few green nuts that have dropped from trees. Many of them had no holes at all. Some had holes near the top; but these were most probably made by some rodent as suggested by the ragged outlines and the chewed-up look of the fibre. Along with the palm squirrel, coconut trees are regularly visited by some kind or kinds of rat. Where the flying squirrel is present, most of the blame for destroying nuts can safely be placed at its door.

Flowernectar and the sap of trees are both rather thick and sticky, and the woodpecker's tongue should be able to mop them up. But even if the bird could 'suck' the thick milk of the coconut, it would get only a few drops from the part closest to the hole bored by it. Drinking coconut milk is definitely not something that the woodpecker 'could easily accomplish' as claimed by Mr Ghorpade. He fancies that a woodpecker 'in the course of normal boring operations may have... by chance... made a hole in a nut and instead of encountering insects, had its first taste of the highly nutritious coconut milk while feeling around with its tongue.' The major flaw in this argument is that pecking at green coconuts on the tree is not part of the 'normal boring operations' of any species of woodpecker.

Mr Ghorpade says he shot a woodpecker that was accused of drinking coconut milk. I wonder why he did not examine the stomach contents or send the body after skinning to the Bombay Natural History Society for examination.

Any woodpecker that habitually visits coconut trees should be reckoned among the chief benefactors of the owner. It is well known that the most injurious pests of the coconut tree are certain kinds of beetles and their grubs. Equally well known should be the fact that to woodpeckers the fat grubs of beetles are as Rasgolla to the

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Bengali. If woodpeckers are declared to be enemies of the coconut tree, we may expect the Purplerumped Sunbird (with its needle-like bill and fondness for the inflorescence of the coconut tree) to be proclaimed Enemy No. 2!

Man has found enough excuses for the extermination of birds and other animals. We, professed birdwatchers, should not add any more to these excuses without really watching and weighing the resulting evidence. I do hope that Mr Ghorpade will never again shoot any bird simply to oblige some peasant who has branded it a pest.

By the way, I think Mr Ghropade's observation on our winter visitors (Newsletter Vol. 10(6): 13) is quite correct. Last winter I found that the numbers of sandpipers and plovers (particularly of the Sand Plover) seen on the beaches here was much smaller than in winter of 1968-69. Will the Editor put in a special appeal to readers to comment on this?

MONSOON VISITORS TO BOMBAY

D. A. Stairmand

This year I have recorded our three most well-known SW. monsoon visitors as follows:

Indian Pitta : 24 May, below Kanheri Caves

Indian Threetoed Forest Kingfisher : 14 June, at a stream
near the Bacon Factory, Borivli

Pied Crested Cuckoo : 21 June, at Erangal, Marve

I had already finished a morning's birdwatching around Kanheri Caves on 14/vi and was having a quiet smoke in my car at around 1 p.m. when the resplendent Threetoed Kingfisher appeared on the road-side wall of the stream by which I was sitting looking at the water rushing over the rocks and enjoying the rather tempestuous sounds. Neither I nor the kingfisher were aware of each other's presence at first as I was looking in the opposite direction and the kingfisher had its back towards me. I was the first to realise the situation and took up my binoculars and had a rewarding look at this beautiful little bird before my concentration apparently 'bore' into the kingfisher's back for it looked over its shoulder, noted my proximity and flew off over the stream.

My sighting of the Pied Crested Cuckoo will leave no contenders for the 'wooden spoon'. The sighting of this most important 'rains' visitor is definitely not my forte. There were a pair of these birds in chasing flight and I must admit that I had forgotten just how elegant they are in their black and white colours with attractive crests, beautiful long tails and the conspicuous white patches on the wings when in flight.

Maybe the following are not wholly monsoon visitors but I would like to record

Whitethroated Ground Thrush*: 26/v, below Kanheri Caves

*Please see editorial footnote to p. 7, Newsletter Vol. 10(7)

Heartspotted Woodpecker¹ : 26/v, below Kanheri Caves. There were a pair by 31/v and I think D. V. Cowen's Plate 52 in Volume 4 of the Handbook of a pair of these birds is splendid. The female's buffy white forehead and crown, topping the slender whitish neck, and crown of the head surmounted by a big black crest made her very attractive. Perhaps even more attractive than the male and her chattering scream was loud from about 20 feet away.

Indian Drongo-Cuckoo² : 31/v, below Kanheri Caves. At first I suspected a Black Drongo but the Drongo-Cuckoo's sluggish disposition and white bars on the outermost tail feathers near their base were tell-tale features.

Last week-end, 20-21/vi, I was delighted to find two pairs of Yellow-wattled Lapwings on a stony hillock at Erangal, Marve. One pair obviously had eggs or chicks and I was 'dive-bombed' frequently. I had not seen them there in 1½ years of fairly regular visits although Redwattled Lapwings always occupy that hillock. It seems the wrong time of year for Yellow-wattled Lapwings to take up such a position as they usually prefer dry areas. I was unable to discover either eggs or chicks on the red laterite soil.

SOME NOTES ON THE AVIFAUNA OF KATHMANDU, NEPAL, WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A NUMBER OF BIRDS OF PREY

Dr V. M. Galushin, Unesco Expert, New Delhi

General Impressions of Common Birds

A short visit to Kathmandu from 11 to 16th of April 1970 gave to the author some impressions of common birds of the Nepalese capital.

The general outline of the avifauna of Kathmandu is mostly alike to that of Delhi. The commonest birds are the House Crow (Corvus splendens), Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis), Blue Rock Pigeon (Columba livia), Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer), Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis). There are plenty of sparrows. However, approximately three-fourths of them belong to House Sparrow (Passer domesticus), the rest of them are Tree Sparrow (Passer montanus) which are absent in Delhi. The Roseringed Parakeet (Psittacula krameri) which is extremely numerous in Delhi rarely occurs in Kathmandu. On

¹ Presumably a resident. - Ed.

² The status of the Drongo-Cuckoo in our area is uncertain. However its presence in our midst starts being felt from early June by its distinctive short whistling notes: 1-2-3-4-5-6 (sometimes going up to 9). The last specimen from our area collected by the Bombay-Salsette Survey was towards the end of September. - Ed.

the contrary the Magpie Robin (Copsychus saularis) is much more abundant there. Swallows (Hirundo daurica and H. rustica) are also likely to occur more often there than in the capital of India.

Early in the morning of 13th April the author was a witness to a mutual hunting by crows, sparrows and swallow upon some moths. Swallows seemed to be most profitable in that crowd. They were flying above the crows and sparrows which searched for moths on the ground and walls. 80-90 per cent of insects managed to escape from the latter predators by flying up.

However more than half of them were immediately caught on the fly by swallows. Frightened by these new enemies the rest of the moths fell down on asphalt. Now about half of their number became victims of crows and sparrows there. So in the long run more than three-fourth of the moths which have been discovered primarily by crows and sparrows were unable to save themselves against the double attack, both on the ground and in the air. Of the entire prey the greater part fell to Swallows' lot.

Occasionally (most at the morning excursions) the author had met the Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) -- 2-3 pairs within the city, Whitecheeked Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys), Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata), Rufousbacked Shrike (Lanius schach), some Wren-Warblers (most probably Prinia sp.), White-eye (Zosterops palpebrosa).

Out of non-Passerines were noted some swifts (Apus melba, A. affinis or A. pacificus), one Cuckoo (Cuculus sp.) and a few Redwattled Lapwings (Vanellus indicus).

In the northern part of Kathmandu near the Royal Palace a small (10-15 nests) mixed colony of the Little (Egretta garzetta) and Cattle (Bubulcus ibis) Egrets was discovered. Some Paddy (Ardeola grayii) and solitary Little Green (Butorides striatus) herons were also noted there.

At dusk about 7.30 p.m. on the 12th of April a small owl, most probably the Spotted Owllet (Athene brama), flew down from the pole close to the Blue Star Hotel (the southern part of Kathmandu) and caught a large cricket on asphalt not far away than two metres from us.

Two kinds of birds of prey were registered by the author within the capital of Nepal. They were one pair of the Himalayan Griffon Vulture (Gyps himalayensis) on the bank of Bagmati river and a few Pariah Kites (Milvus migrans).

A provisional estimation of the predatory bird population within Kathmandu

To collect some comparative data to his study of birds of prey population of Delhi the author made an attempt to estimate a number of predatory birds within Kathmandu.

For that purpose a special area for detailed inspection was picked up in a form of a strip: 5 km long and 0.5 km wide. As in Delhi it crossed the whole city from north to south and included various types of habitats: the northern-western outskirts with small houses,

kitchen-gardens and scarce trees, the respectable and green northern-central part near the Royal Palace with dense parks and gardens, the busy and, partly, shopping centres, the stadium, the southern suburb along Bagmati river almost deprived of trees.

The entire area under inspection covered 250 hectares (ha) or 2.5 sq. km. About 1200 trees above 8 m in height (including 570 ones higher than 15 m) were accounted for within the area, i.e. about 5 trees (including 2 high ones) per 1 ha in average.

Three nesting pairs of predatory birds -- all of them were Pariah Kites -- inhabited the area under study. One pair lived near the northern edge of the area. The author failed to find its nest in dense park between the British and Indian Embassies. The nest of the second pair was discovered on the tree 32 m in height just above the southern gate of the Royal Palace. It was built close to the end of a side branch at an altitude of about 18 m. The third pair nested near the Clock Tower within the busy centre. The nest was on the tree 22 m in height. It was situated on a fork of the trunk 16 m above the ground. In both nests the Kites fed their small nestlings. Their breeding season seemed to start there at least one month later than in Delhi.

Three nesting pairs discovered within 2.5 sq. km are equal to 1.2 pairs per 1 sq. km in average. If the situation within the area under study is more or less typical for the whole city which covers roughly 40 sq. km, we can calculate that the total number of kites within Kathmandu is approximately 50 breeding pairs; plus a few pairs of Himalayan Vultures and still there might be some rare and unregistered species; and that to the author's mind, are not more than 10 pairs all together. Therefore, the entire population of birds of prey within Kathmandu city is unlikely to exceed 60 breeding pairs.

These data extremely differ from the results of the similar kind of a study made by the author within Delhi in 1967-69. The average density of the Kite population in Delhi is 16.1 breeding pairs per 1 sq. km, i.e. 13 times higher than that of Kathmandu. Within the capital of India the total number of both Kites (2400 pairs according to the author's estimation) and birds of prey as a whole (roughly about 3000 breeding pairs) outnumbers the corresponding figures for the capital of Nepal by 50 times!

FOSTER PARENTS FOR AN ORPHANED MINIVET

Mira Majithia

While walking in the gardens of Government House one late afternoon we found a small young bird -- fully feathered -- fluttering helplessly at the foot of a tall deodar tree. We looked around for signs of the parent birds -- high up in the branches we caught sight of a pair of minivets, the scarlet male and the golden female. We then noticed that the young bird had a little yellow on his tail and the tips of his wings, otherwise he was dull speckled grey brown.

Since it was near nightfall and the young bird was obviously unable

to fly, we took it home with us to the other end of Nainital, three miles away. We made a small nest in a box and tried to feed the chick with oatmeal and a little milk. It ate very little and then settled down in the nest for the night.

Early next morning we placed the box in a sunny patch on the upstairs bedroom window, behind a wirenetting. The young bird sat at the edge of the box and started chirping -- it gradually grew quite loud and clear in his tones and within a few minutes a pair of minivets appeared, frantically flying close to the wirenetting, trying to reach the young one. The mother bird was calling frantically and arching her body with the tail feathers spread in a fan shape and the wings fluttering downwards in a hovering motion. The young bird had climbed up on the inside of the netting and was chirping loudly. We took him downstairs and put him on the branches of a peach tree and hid on the veranda to watch. The parent birds flew back and forth and several times sat on each side of the young one on the branch. He finally fluttered down from the peach tree onto a small hedge and then still further downwards to a tennis court below, where some children were playing.

It began to rain, so we picked him up again and brought him uphill, near the house and left him in a leafy apple tree, with the parent birds still fluttering around.

We lost sight of him until afternoon, when the rain cleared. At about three he was discovered on a small footpath with no sign of the 'parents'. We brought him inside and again placed him on a window ledge. Within minutes the couple were back. This time we closely observed and noticed them literally stuffing the little one with food. A large black and white butterfly went down with ease and a lot of smaller tit bits were eagerly devoured. He eventually fluttered from the window ledge to a grassy bank outside and sat there for some time, while the parents kept alighting on the ground and continued feeding him. The mother occasionally gave a startled cry and spread her wings and arched her body as she had done previously.

Night was falling and as the baby bird was obviously still unable to fly, we took him inside as before. Next morning again we put him in the same bedroom window, where he immediately started chirping loudly. Again the 'parents' arrived, calling frantically and beating against the wire screen. We made a small straw nest in a flat wicker basket and pushed it into the upper branches of a honeysuckle creeper on the house. The parents found him at once and began sitting each side of him on a branch.

Suddenly the young one flew, quite strongly, in an upward direction to a nearby tree with the parent birds. We never saw them again.

We wonder whether the pair of elder minivets were the real parents of the young one. Could they really have followed him such a distance (which the baby traversed by car). Or is it possible that another pair of minivets found and adopted this young one????

[It is well known that birds, especially in the breeding season, are attracted by the cheeps of young birds, not necessarily of their own species -- whether by their squeals of distress or food-begging calls. In the breeding season there is a strong urge on the part of adult birds of either or both sexes to respond to the food-begging cheeps of young birds, especially in individuals that have recently lost their brood through some misadventure. In this way adults have been observed feeding even the young of species entirely different from their own. In the present case it seems unlikely that the chick's own parents had followed their offspring all that distance. What is more probable is that a bereaved pair of minivets found an orphaned chick cheeping for food and adopted it. -- Eds.]

ARRIVAL OF THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO (CIAMATOR JACOBINUS) IN BOMBAY

J. S. Serrao

Has the Pied Crested Cuckoo arrived in Bombay later than the SW. monsoon did? [Cf. G. De, Newsletter 10(7): 11.] A section of the local press put them down as late and jeered the birdwatchers for their failure to arrive in time.

As did Mr De, I saw my first bird of the season on 31.v.1970 down Pali Hill at about 7 in the morning. The following day (1st June) I saw no less than four individuals about the same locality, on each occasion being chased by crows, and the crows in turn being followed by the urchins of the locality. Yet I definitely feel that the birds arrived in Bombay well in advance of the first outburst of the SW. monsoon.

True we have had our first showers on 28th May afternoon and they were accompanied by gusty winds. But I am inclined to consider them as our pre-monsoon outbursts during a time an expected storm was reported by the press. The weather report in the morning papers on 1/vi indicated that the SW. monsoon was fast advancing along north Konkan, wherefrom it is clear that the showers we had on 28/v were not the true SW. monsoon.

Yet another indication (perhaps a very rustic one) that the SW. monsoon had yet not commenced in Bombay was available from the Wild Banana. On 31/v an examination of the spots where it grows around Tulsi showed no signs of its sprouting to life again, in spite of the heavy showers of 28/v. The Wild Banana starts doing so with the first showers of the true SW. monsoon rains; any amount of pre-monsoon showers fail to induce it to life again.

It is evident from all this that the Pied Crested Cuckoos, harbingers of the SW. monsoon, were in Bombay well in advance of the SW. monsoon rains.

Incidentally the Bombay Natural History Society as far back as 23.vi.1910 (Journal Vol. 20: 537-8) appealed to its members for last sightings of the Pied Crested Cuckoo in Bombay. One such date I have is 26.x.1969 from Aarey, Goregaon.

REVIEW

WATCHING BIRDS. By Jamal Ara. Pp. 64 (20 x 15 cm). Illustrated by J. P. Irani. National Book Trust, India, 1970. Price Rs1.50

Author, illustrator and publisher deserve united congratulation upon the emergence of this attractive, useful and timely little booklet. Timely because of the belated but increasing popularity bird watching is gaining as an outdoor hobby in India today. The booklet provides a good introduction to birds in general, describing their various characteristics in 11 simply written chapters covering topics such as coloration, nesting, migration and bird-ringing, food, flight and structural adaptations. Suggestions are offered on how to attract and encourage birds around homes and in gardens by providing them with food, water and nest-boxes, and finally hints are given for meaningful birdwatching. The last should be of particular usefulness to faltering beginners and new aspirants, and to such as wonder what it is all about!

The booklet is primarily aimed at youngsters and written in simple language to form part of the excellent series Nehru Bal Pustakalaya (Library for Children) published by the National Book Trust, India. It is written by an experienced and knowledgeable birdwatcher, needing no introduction to readers of the Newsletter, and illustrated by one of our upcoming young bird artists; a combination of their talents has resulted in an unusually attractive production. Considering the limitations of 2-colour printing (in order to keep down the price) the artist has done a remarkably pleasing job with his imaginative sketches. In these days of high printing costs and general expensiveness of illustrated books the price seems astonishingly — almost unbelievably — low. This, together with its attractive get-up and interesting and useful contents will, let us hope, enable every aspiring birdwatcher to possess a copy. It should help to start him off — no matter his age — on the path of a fascinating hobby which can provide perennial enjoyment in the out-of-doors for the rest of his natural days.

SA

OBITUARY

ROGER HOLMES

One of the keenest birdwatchers in India within recent years, who was also a staunch supporter of the Newsletter, Roger Holmes, was killed in a car accident at Geneva, Switzerland, in May this year. Friends who had had occasion to ride with Roger in his Jeep over the terrifying mountain roads of Bhutan were always somewhat shaken in their peace of mind, but nevertheless filled with admiration for his skill at the wheel! It is ironical that the good luck which kept him company for so long over those fearsome roads should have

deserted him under less trying conditions.

While stationed at Phuntsholing for the past three years as Manager of the Bank of Bhutan, Roger made the fullest use of his opportunities to add to our meagre knowledge of the birds of this little explored region. He went out of his way to be hospitable to, and assist, any birdwatcher who strayed within his ken, and helped in no small measure to supplement the records of the recent ornithological expeditions to Bhutan by Drs Salim Ali and B. Biswas. He was a highly competent field ornithologist and an indefatigable mist-netter and collector, possessed of boundless enthusiasm, energy and stamina; seasoned birdwatchers like Peter Jackson and Tom Roberts confessed that they were usually quite worn out when birding with Roger Holmes!

May his soul rest in peace.

Z.F.

CORRESPONDENCE

Ten days at Diu

During a stay of ten days in Diu in February, I observed the daily routine of the gulls. Lesser-Blackbacked Gulls, Larus fuscus were the most common along the coast. In the NW. part of the islands near Vankbara we were able to see a lot of gulls, terns and skimmers, particularly when the fishing boats and trawlers returned. There was nothing remarkable to observe in the woods on the mainland, but there were rollers, hoopoes, mynas, crow-pheasants, parakeets, and lapwings. There were snipe, sandpipers, wagtails along the road bordering the dry ditches. We once observed a flock of Rufous-fronted Wren-Warblers and Brahminy Mynas. The Black Ibis was met with on the outskirts of the town. My most remarkable experience was on 17th February, and if I am not mistaken I saw a Pinklegged Herring Gull (Larus argentatus) when I was on a fishing trawler c. 20 km off the post of Diu, when a solo was seen flying in a NW. direction.

We are grateful to Vipin Parikh for his useful note in Vol. 10(3) of the Newsletter.

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BIRDS OF LANGTANG VALLEY, NEPAL

Robert L. Fleming, Jr.

Langtang Valley, although not far from Kathmandu, has not been visited often by birdwatching enthusiasts. It is a hidden valley -- hidden that is, from Kathmandu, by the jagged Gosainkund range and the Ganja la peaks. It is well worth the effort to explore -- as we found out last October.

Langtang Village at 11,000 feet altitude is just six days trek from Kathmandu -- six fairly un strenuous days. But we chose an even more un strenuous way to go. At 12,400 feet elevation an airfield for STOL (short-take-off-and-landing) planes has been constructed recently. We would go that way! On 10 October, as we approached for landing, I took a picture -- hopefully of the runway which I could not see. In the photograph I now show friends, the field is quite visible -- if you look hard.

Redbilled Choughs (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) greeted us as we eagerly tumbled out of the plane. Massive mountain walls and cliffs rose sharply from the wide, glaciated valley floor. The Choughs must roost and nest up there somewhere. A White Wagtail (Motacilla alba), now here on migration, ran about a sandbank of the Langtang Khola. Black Redstarts (Phoenicurus ochruros) and Hodgson's Pipits (Anthus pelopus) fed in the snow-sprinkled meadow.

But we must unload our things. The pilot is impatient to be off. Soon the winds will rise, making flying impossible. There is no activity on this field after about 9.30 a.m. except, perhaps, for the grazing yaks.

From the airfield we puffed up a slight climb to the summer village of Kyangjin (at 12,600 feet) nestled beneath Langtang Peak (23,771 ft elevation). A cheese factory operates here, collecting milk from naks (female yaks) and chaunri-gai (yak-cow crosses). We were welcomed by the manager and camped comfortably in the grassy meadow nearby for several days. Two large Tibetan Ravens (Corvus corax) kept watch on our activities. They liked to perch in the sun on the flag poles of the Buddhist Gumpa. Himalayan Jungle Crows (Corvus macrorhynchos) were common, finding food in a small rivulet that drained the village area. Occasionally a solitary bird or a pair of bold Redbilled Choughs would venture near us. Yellowbilled Choughs (Pyrrhocorax graculus) sometimes descended near the camp out; they were not as tame.

We decided to explore the valley and slopes immediately to the north of Kyangjin. Dwarf *Ionocera* and rhododendros were common, mixed with grass and sedges. Much of the territory was filled with lichen-covered boulders deposited in glacial moraines or talus fans. Birds were disappointingly few.

After descending from examining the icefall of the Drakpoche south glacier, I spotted a fine looking bird perched on top of a rounded boulder. It was a large redstart: black and red with the top of the head white. White spots in the wings showed conspicuously in flight. Gldenstadt's Redstart (Phoenicurus erythrogaster)! This bird is rare in Nepal; it had been collected only once before -- at Jomsom north of Annapurna. I had never seen it. Generally it resembles the Whitecapped River Chat (Chaimarrornis leucocephalus) but the whole forehead and crown is a grey-white.

Later we found several more Gldenstadt's Redstarts at Langsisa, eight miles up the main valley from Kyangjin. From our observations there it appeared that this redstart is very much a 'rock' bird. They were most likely to be found on tumbled glacial moraines. They do perch on bushes though, but usually select rocks. Much of their time is spent on the ground between boulders where they search for food. One insect led an especially beautiful bird on quite a merry chase over and around boulders before it was caught. Besides insects, the redstarts ate orange berries that were common here.

Langsisa is a fine place. Villagers have constructed a large stone shelter in which they spend the summer. By October people have left this altitude (13,600 ft) so we occupied their 'cottage' in great comfort. From Langsisa we explored the three main glaciers of the region.

North of us the snout of the great Langtang Glacier (about 10 miles long) descended to about 14,000 feet. The ice of the glacier was not immediately visible for it was covered with huge boulders and small pebbles. Glaciers are not noted, as you can imagine, for

spectacular birdwatching. Nonetheless our curiosity was well rewarded for we saw several birds on or over the Langtang Glacier. A Wallcreeper (Tichodroma muraria) landed on a boulder about 15,500 feet elevation in the centre of the glacier. Lammergeiers (Gypaetus barbatus) occasionally circled overhead.

Once while we were resting at 16,000 feet on a sharp ridge between the ablation valley and the main glacier, a small bird shot past my ear. What was that? It looked dark and roundish. Following frantically with my eye, I watched until it alighted on a jagged rock fall. Here, with my binoculars, I could see it working over the rocks. A distinct black crest and white cheeks gave it away immediately. A Rufousbellied Crested Titmouse (Parus rubidiventris). I knew they hunted above the tree-line, but had not realized to what extent!

Snow Pigeons (Columba leuconota) rested on cliffs above the glacier; there were no signs of the Turkestan Hill Pigeons (Columba rupestris) which we might have expected here. Snowcock (Tetraogallus) droppings on rocks at 15,500 ft indicated their presence but they kept well out of sight. Gamebirds in general were relatively scarce.

By late October, and with the night temperatures dropping to 10 below zero (C), we decided to move southwards. After passing the Cheese Factory we came upon, at 11,600 ft our first Himaliid -- the Whitebrowed Tit-Babbler (Alcippe vinipectus). It was good to see this confiding bird again. A strange feeling though, to record 'the first Tit-Babblers at 11,600 feet.' Usually we comment 'the last Tit-Babblers were at 11,600 feet.' But such is the age of air travel.

Around Langtang Village are numerous fields and bushes which hide Streaked Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax lineatus) and Tickell's Leaf Warblers (Phylloscopus affinis). Usually the highest altitude Laughing Thrush is the Blackfaced (Garrulax affinis), but not here. For some reason, the Blackfaced was not seen until about 8900 feet -- below the level of three other Laughing Thrush species.

Below Langtang Village, the path winds gradually downwards through Foxtail and other grasses; numerous ferns grow on the banks. Across the valley beautiful conifers covered the slopes to about 11,500 ft. At this time of year the Larch (Larix griffithii) turns yellow in preparation to losing its needles. To see these golden trees standing erect amongst the dark green Firs (Abies spectabilis) and Hemlocks (Tsuga dumosa) is almost worth the whole trip in itself.

Once down to about 10,900 feet, familiar birds began to crowd in on all sides. Brown Titmice (Parus dichrous), Coal Titmice (Parus ater), Green Shrike Babblers (Pteruthius xanthochloris) and Striped-throated (Minla strigula) flocked together.

At about 9600 feet the valley suddenly narrows, indicating the extent of the Langtang Glacier during the ice ages. Now, the rushing torrent has swollen so that it is hard to hear much bird song unless one can get behind a slight rise and away from the stream.

Evening was descending so we decided to camp in the forest. Near our tents, Spotted Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax ocellatus) peered suspiciously through the bushes and then moved silently away. Suddenly

a strange bird sang. What was it? I stumbled over moss-covered logs and between yellow-leaved Maples to peer into a tall dark Oak (Quercus semecarpifolia). Couldn't see a thing. Then a movement and the songster hopped upon an exposed branch. The Longbilled Ground Thrush (Zoothera monticola) continued singing. I had never heard its loud and ruggedly beautiful song before.

Our camp was pitched in a little clearing replete with numerous wild bear diggings. My companions felt a little nervous as darkness descended in the dark forest. Nothing to worry about though, even the notorious Black Bears, of which we had seen signs here, will not attack men unless startled at close range.

The next morning we continued downstream, past Nuthatches, Warblers, Titmice and Rosefinches, but eventually we had to leave the valley and climb up a slope in order to pass the steep-walled gorge of the lower Jangtang. The contrast of the sunlit, grassy slopes to the dark forests we had just left was dramatic. Now we watched Rufous-breasted Accentors (Prunella strophilata) while Himalayan Griffons (Gyps himalayensis) circled overhead. Once past the grassy slopes, the path descends abruptly through beautiful pine woods to Syabrubesi and the confluence of the Jangtang and Bhoté Kosi rivers. From here it is a comfortable three day walk back to Trisuli Bazaar and the bus to Kathmandu.

KHANDALA DURING THE SW. MONSOON

D. A. Stairmand

My notes were made over the past two months covering the week-ends of 6-7/vi; 27-28/vi; a day's visit on 19/vii (when I also visited the Deccan Plateau); the week-ends of 25-26/vii; 1-2/viii and 8-9/viii. Each week-end consisted of approximately 24 hours in Khandala and this was spent within a radius of about one mile of the hotel at which I stayed and the area included trees around the hotel, a well-covered and wooded stream, a roadside tank, a wooded hillside with a duct and power house a little way up it, some open grassland, a cliff and several waterfalls and streams. The 'rains' started early and June's rainfall was well above average but July, although off to a very wet start, ended up considerably below normal. Rainfall was picking up again in August. The temperatures were always very pleasant and the foliage lush, although this area did not include any really well-wooded country.

The highlight for me on all these visits was the Malabar Whistling Thrush (Myiophonus horreoides) with its blue-black coat of feathers and beautiful, glistering cobalt-blue on forehead and shoulders. In certain lights -- not necessarily bright light -- practically the whole back and wings of some of these birds were a most glorious shining blue. The male's rich, rambling whistling song was heard frequently during all hours of daylight and its tranquilising effect on me as the song mounted over the sound of rushing streams was priceless. Pairs

of these birds were to be seen everywhere in this area, except near the roadside tanks. As each pair has a fairly large territory there were perhaps not many pairs but the song carries well and I was seldom out of earshot of it. One or two of the pairs were reasonably unafraid and I watched these hopping along swiftly, occasionally picking up snails or crabs and battering this food on the rocks to remove the shells. On 26/vii I was delighted to discover a nest of a pair of Malabar Whistling Thrushes on a small window-sill of the power house. The window itself was painted over and obviously not in use and the nest looked for all the world like a flower pot, this deception being enhanced by the fact that some green plant life was growing around it. The nest was in an inaccessible position -- for me -- across the power house tank but I was on a higher level and could see three small nestlings being fed. A stream was running into the tank and the surrounds were wooded and hilly. On 1/viii there were only two nestlings and this was also the case on 8-9/viii and by that time one nestling, very much larger than the other, was getting all the food while I watched and looked almost ready to leave the nest. The nestlings had been, by 9/viii, at least 15 days in the nest, and in addition, perhaps were 2-3 days old when I first saw them on 26/vii. As they were still in the nest on 9/viii 17-20 days would appear to be a reasonable assumption for the period from the time of hatching to the time of leaving nest.

A few of the points I observed about this pair of adult birds were that the food fed to the nestlings was of a variety of colours -- sometimes appearing yellow or orange; at other times white or muddy brown. As the adult birds flew out of sight to collect the food I am not able to elaborate on this. Feeding of the nestlings early morning and in the evening took place sporadically at about the rate of 8 visits in 45 minutes and feeding was carried out by both adults who sometimes arrived at the nest almost simultaneously with beakfuls of food. It would appear, however, that the female does more of the work as this adult male was prone to fly away to a tree-top just behind and above me and sing away for long intervals or merely meditate after depositing his beakful of food in a nestling's upturned mouth while the female continued to visit the nest with food. Towards nightfall both birds would remove the nestling's excreta from the nest after every visit with food. This did not happen in the mornings while I watched. The thrushes were very wary and uttered a warning call -- a sharp Kree-ee -- in retreating flight upon the approach of an intruder.

The other thrush seen in June was the Whitethroated Ground Thrush (Zoothera citrina cyanotus) and although not consciously seen by me in July I recognized its rollicking song, especially after hearing an excellent programme on AIR given by Bro. J. Navairo, S.J. The first week-end, 6-7/vi, I saw these thrushes very much as I expected to -- a glimpse of a bird on the ground near a wooded stream and then being able to follow its flight low into a tree -- where I could often study it. On 27-28/vi sightings were much better; firstly a pair on

a grass bank above a wooded stream when, in sunlight, I could easily distinguish the female from the male as her slaty-blue upperparts were suffused with olive-green. Even better, and more surprising, was when I walked onto the path leading to the roadside tank. A pair of these lovely birds were on the edge of the path digging into the mulch and flicking over the mud and leaves looking for insects. They were only about 30 feet from me and as they advanced along the path industriously so did I. I watched them for 10 minutes like this and found their tameness unusual and they were, too, in remarkably 'civilized' surroundings.

I noticed that in addition to the Malabar Whistling Thrushes several other birds had bred at Khandala. On 6-7/vi pairs of Pied Bushchats (Saxicola caprata) were feeding their nestlings in nests in earth cuttings and Wiretailed Swallows, Dusky Crag Martins and Large Pied Wagtails (Motacilla maderaspatensis) had young out of nest. The Pied Bushchats were not seen after that week-end. On 27/vi I noted a party of mature and immature Brahmany Mynas. On 26/vii a party of 6 beautiful Orange (or possibly Scarlet) Minivets included young males with pale orange fading to whitish below and some yellow on the upperparts. A Dabchick sat on its pad of sodden weeds on floating vegetation on the roadside tank from at least 2/viii and was still there on 9/viii. Upon leaving the nest the bird always covered the nest with sodden weeds. Last September a pair of Dabchicks had a family of 5 dripey on the tank. A sole Cotton Teal was on the tank on 2/viii and this species, too, had a family party on the tank last September. No Bronze-winged Jacanas there this year, though.

Birds that appeared to be on passage migration were Green Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis) on 7/vi; Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters (Merops leschmaulti) on 28/vi and Brownheaded Storkbilled Kingfishers (Pelargopsis capensis) stayed over for the week-end of 27-28/vi. The latter were over and around wooded streams, noisy and unmistakable with their large size, enormous red bills and pale yellowish brown underparts. I noted at least three of these big kingfishers.

A lovely interlude at lunch time on 26/vii was provided by a party of about 8 Spotted Babblers (Pellorneum ruficeps) in thick shrubs and bushes very close to hotel rooms. They were in song and I could not miss the loud percussive clear whistling notes of these charming little babblers. Of their song Dr Salim Ali in Indian Hill Birds writes: 'The Spotted Babbler is a remarkable songster. It sings principally in the breeding season, of course, but short sporadic bursts may be heard at all times. The song is a percussive loud, clear whistling of several notes, ambling up and down the scale, with many variations, sometimes lasting fully three minutes or more with practically no break.' I moved up slowly on this party and first of all saw them running around like small quail. Fortunately they were not shy and two Spotted Babblers flew up a few feet and clung to stems and sang away, both at the same time, for several minutes while two other birds (females?) looked up at them admiringly from lower down the bushes and uttered more subdued notes. I was within 20 feet of them and it was bitter-sweet when they passed on. Another pretty little babbler

seen by me was the Rufousbellied Babbler (Dumetia hyperythra) with a white throat.

Common birds around this area were Jungle Babblers, Jungle Mynas, Common Ioras, Redwhiskered and Redvented bulbuls, Tickell's Flowerpecker, House and Jungle Crows, Spotted Doves, Magpie Robins, Indian Robins, Coucals, Whitebreasted Kingfishers, Purplerumped Sunbirds, Small Green Barbets and Coppersmiths. More colourful birds seen occasionally included Goldfronted Chloropsis, Scarlet Minivets, Small Minivets and Yellowbacked Sunbirds. I did not note the Small Sunbird (Nectarinia minima) which was possibly confined to the forest. Bush Quail, Grey Junglefowl and Red Spurfowl were not uncommon and I had glimpses of 3 woodpeckers: the Rufous, Goldenbacked, and the Maharashtra woodpeckers, Lorikeets and Common Wood Shrikes. The Pied Crested Cuckoo was apparent (even to me!) from July onwards but 'warblers' were not.

Beyond Pariah Kites and vultures I was not able to identify the few birds-of-prey I saw.

During a short trip to Wadgaon -- 20 miles from Khandala -- on the morning of 19/vii there was not only a change of scenery in this lower rainfall area -- Babools (Acacia arabica) in charming yellow balls of flower and open grassland prominent -- but a change of species of birds. Streaked Fantail Warblers and Indian Wren-Warblers filled the air with their electric noises and zigzag flight and parties of Large Grey Babblers (Turdoides malcolmi) held sway. Amongst other birds seen were the Grey Tit, Rufousbacked Shrike, Blackwinged Kite, White Scavenger Vulture, Redrumped Swallows (collecting mud for nests), Wiretailed Swallows, Redvented Bulbuls, Brahminy Mynas, Common Mynas, dozens of Bayns with their nests, Skylarks, Crested Larks, Indian Pipits and a pair of Red Turtle Doves.

At Talegaon I put up ten Purple Moorhens (Porphyrio porphyrio) from a tank and with their slow take off and flight they must provide a very low form of 'sport' indeed.

PAUCITY OF MIGRATORY WADERS AND WATERBIRDS IN THE SOUTH DURING 1969-70 COLD SEASON

J. S. Serrao

Paucity in the South of migratory waders and shorebirds during the cold season 1969-70 is reported in the Newsletter by Mr K. D. Ghorpade Vol. 10(6): 13 and Prof. K. K. Neelakantan Vol. 10(8): 3. A possible explanation for this shortage is being sought. This reminds one of an article entitled THE INFLUENCE OF RAINFALL ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRATORY WADERS AND WATER BIRDS. by G. Vidal Esq., F.S., in 1879 in Stray Feathers Vol. 8: 170-74.

The article was a follow-up of one by A. G. Hume, entitled BIRDS OF A DROUGHT in 1878 in Stray Feathers 7: 52-68. Hume, by an exhaustive process, had shown how a large number of species were banished from a

particular tract in the neighbourhood of Jodhpur (Rajasthan) after a season of abnormally light rainfall. Precisely similar results, after the exceptionally heavy rainfall in 1878, were evidenced in regard to migratory shorebirds and waterfowl in South Konkan. This paucity appeared to be in contradiction to Nature's Law and prompted Vidal to ventilate it in the hope of some reader suggesting the true explanation of the phenomenon.

For the scope of his paper Vidal analysed a tract of land which he was studying for six years — a tract c. 70 miles long, and 35-45 miles wide between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, intersected by three tidal and navigable (up to c. 20 miles inland) rivers, the Savitri, the Vashisti and the Shastri. The average rainfall for the 28 years preceding 1878 was 101.49 inches at Ratnagiri. In 1878 Ratnagiri experienced a rainfall of 168.66 inches, being by many inches the highest on record.

The wader and duck population during the cold weather that followed was at the lowest compared to the year 1877 and those preceding it. The rainfall recorded for 1877 was only 87.91 inches, and the cold weather that followed had proved to be a splendid snipe year. Flamingoes had also appeared in Ratnagiri, but were completely absent during 1878.

An interesting feature of 1877 cold weather was the very large flock of Ring Dove (Turtur risoria (= Streptopelia decaocto) which appeared in the northern portion of the district from country above the Ghats. In the winter of 1878-79, as far as could be ascertained, not a single Ring Dove was seen. However migratory warblers were well represented in 1878, and the Rosy Pastors which prefer the fat plains of the Deccan and usually do not come in such force to the area covered were exceptionally abundant.

A comparison of lists of birds collected or seen at Kelsi during the winters of 1877 and 1878 led Vidal to the tentative conclusion that the exceptionally heavy rainfall of 1878 had provided the migrant waders and waterbirds with proportionately greater expanses of inundated lands all over the country than were available in a year of normal or scanty rainfall, and thus provided them with suitable feeding grounds further north, making it unnecessary to proceed southwards.

Vidal's conclusion may be one of the factors for the paucity of waders and shorebirds in the South during 1969-70 cold weather. 1969 was a year of heavy rainfall. The inundated areas it made available to the migrants must have been proportionately greater than in a year of normal or scanty rainfall; also longer lasting. The facilities thus created must have cut the migrants off from the necessity of proceeding southwards in numbers they otherwise do.

MIGRATION OF BIRDS

Robert B. Grubb

(Continued from Newsletter Vol. 10(5): 7, May 1970)

Each species has a characteristic behaviour pattern subject to food requirements, sensitiveness to temperature, breeding cycle and other factors. Thus the period of travel as well as the duration of migratory flights vary with species.

Several observers have noted that the young birds have a stronger migratory impulse than the adults. Very often the younger generation migrates first and travels much farther than the adults. In White Storks the adult and the young migrate separately, the latter starting first. Then how they know the direction? No one knows exactly.

Many birds are gregarious during migration. Even those species which are habitually solitary become sociable. It is believed that the migratory impulse and a common migratory behaviour more easily distributed among birds in a flock than among individuals flying separately. However, many flycatchers, shrikes and other kinds prefer to fly alone, none the worse affected.

In one flock of flying migrants it is not necessary that only one species is included. Several species with somewhat the same speed and mode of flight can form a flock. Obviously many species of one natural group (e.g. different kinds of sandpipers in one flock, various species of wagtails in another, etc.) are found together. At times, however, even entirely unrelated species also fly together. The case of the migratory quail (Coturnix coturnix) and the Corn Crane (Crex crex) is an interesting example. About every fifteen quails in a flock are accompanied by one corn crane - the former a gallinaceous bird while the latter a rail. Years ago people who observed this thought that this rail was the leader of the flock and hence they called it the 'King of the Quail'.

Migrants like anatids, pelicans, cranes (not the storks), and even some waders fly in the formation of an inverted V. One of the reasonable explanations is that a bird moving through the air leaves a wake like that produced by a vessel on the sea; birds flying in a triangle, rest on this wave and thus save energy. The planes which follow the patrol leader in this fashion consume less fuel as they take advantage of the eddies. This seems to explain the constant shifting in position of the birds in V formation, apparently to change the wing that is resting on the air currents.

The flight of the migrants overhead often elicit an interest among the local residents, and are induced to imitate temporary migratory manoeuvres.

Birds on migration have a different psychological attitudes towards their surroundings and incidents. They are all set with a strong determination to reach the destination. Storms and adverse weather conditions do not demoralise them. Even predators don't

create a panic. The members of a flock may have to undergo great hardships; may never reach their destination at all. But they endure all the difficulties with stoic indifference. They accept everything with cool resignation.

(Concluded)

PECULIAR FEEDING HABIT OF A WHITEBROWED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER (RHIPIDURA
AUREOLA JESSON)

M. K. Himmatsinhji

I visited Khajuraho (M.P.) on December 18, 1968. There are large lawns in the vicinity of the famous Chandela temples. On one of these big patches of lawns a bullock was tethered by a rather long rope to an ornamental bush and with him was a bird on the lawn which from a distance I took for granted as a wagtail (Motacilla sp.). However as I approached nearer I found to my utter surprise that it was a Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher. It kept on fluttering along the ground in pursuit of insect disturbed by the grazing bullock from the grass. This bird would wait on the surface of the lawn for some time, at times moving from side to side and pirouetting in typical fantail-flycatcher fashion, and would then swiftly dart across to catch its next victim. When any person approached too close it would fly up to one of the shady trees nearby to return again to settle down close to its four-legged friend! It kept on darting hither and thither even between the legs of the grazing bovine.

On one of its visits to the tree nearby when disturbed by a passerby I noticed that he had a companion in the same tree, but while I watched these birds, the second one never descended to the lawn or came anywhere near the bullock.

I have referred to all the literature available with me, and the nearest I got, so far as the feeding habits of this flycatcher are concerned, to my above observation in the references was a description in the Birds of India by Jerdon (Vol. 1, p. 453) where he says: 'I have several times seen it alight on the ground, and sometimes on the back of a cow, and pursuing flies from this rather unusual perch.' The bird I watched not even once settled on the back of the animal concerned. Y. S. Shivraj Kumar informed me that he has on more than one occasion observed this flycatcher accompany grazing animals. It would be interesting to find out whether others have also seen or recorded such behaviour in this or other similar flycatchers.

WOODPECKERS: FRIENDS OR FOES?

K. S. Lavkumar

In the August issue, K. K. Neelakantan quite rightly poured on Ghorpade for his article on the greedy Blackbacked Woodpecker. I do not wish to add to the admonition, though, I may here comment on the

fact that the time has now come to assess whether Man alone has a right to expect the bounties of this fair Earth. Without all the varied and beautiful and bizarre forms of life which are a unique aspect of this small speck in the great cosmos and of which man is a very integral part, how dreadfully dull and unattractive this Earth would be. We as the most intelligent and rational manifestation of life in the known Universe must value the uniqueness of life and thereby increase our own value. We can least afford to talk of benefits for one species or another. We all should share the wonderful Earth which is our Mother and our Home. Man as the eldest or so we hope is, proves by his understanding nature, must care for the unique heritage which he is so fortunate to be able to appreciate. Let a woodpecker even sip a little coconut juice and grow fat on the liquid, the peasant will not lose much. Even the deadly mosquito has become deadly with Man's own evil habits. Where men are clean there are few mosquitoes and it is where there are open gutters and smelling cess-pools that these small insects become a menace. Even so, a little nuisance is better than the ill-advised mass destruction of all insects by insecticides. Do I digress from the point? No, I do not. Destruction of all life whether of spiders, so naughty and annoying as to build cobwebs in corners of rooms, woodpeckers alleged to sip coconut juices, aphids sucking juices from cotton or rose bushes, all, I say, are the results of Man's own personal desire to own everything — the Red Indians of America were massacred because they were vermin, so were the helpless 'Black Fellows' of Australia and the Bushmen of the Kalahari. No, the desire to kill must be curbed. Man must realize the uniqueness of life and thereby in his own value as a species or as an individual. To mind comes the gentle poems of 'Kalaji' the great poet of Gujarati literature: 'Let the birds feed in my garden' said the Prince-poet; it is a small price to pay for the beauty and the joy they afford. Please Mr Ghorpade read all that is coming out in various papers on the destruction of our environment. You are a naturalist; otherwise you would not have looked at or written about the Woodpecker and all of us must stand united in the face of the last fight we will have to put up to save what little there is left. Look at all the good done by birds, animals, the wonderful plants, large and small, and then we shall be happy as we have never been before.

'DESTRUCTIVE HABIT' OF THE BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER

K. D. Ghorpade

Mr. K. K. Neelakantan seems to have got the erroneous impression from my note on the Blackbacked Woodpecker that I have final proof of the alleged destructive habit of this fine bird to coconut fruit and that I have arrived at a definite conclusion. I would like to make it crystal clear here that personally I haven't a shred of evidence to establish the validity or otherwise of the allegation. However, I must confess that some phrases and assumptions in my article were

somewhat misleading and presumptuous, for which I offer my profound regrets. I merely intended to inform readers of the existence of a belief among the rural farmers near our Yelburga estate (that the Blackbacked Woodpecker makes holes in the green nuts, drinks the 'milk' inside and causes fruit drop) and to find out if such a habit has been seen or heard by any of our fellow birdwatchers.

My real intention in writing the note is quite clearly revealed by some statements it contains such as: 'But . . . the birds never ventured anywhere near the nuts . . .'; ' . . . I will certainly try and continue my investigations on a more intensive scale in order that a solution either this way or that may be arrived at. '; 'The above phenomenon also deals with this sucking mode of feeding and I feel that if this habit of drinking the coconut milk is found to be true . . .'; 'All this is mainly conjecture . . .'; and 'At least, for the present we will have to ponder over this probable explanation for the Blackbacked Woodpecker's apparent folly'. But Mr Neelakantan seemingly allowed the 'conservationist' in him to cloud his otherwise sharp eye for detecting errors of presentation in my note.

With all due respect for his 30 years of field experience and love for the birds of our region, I feel I must point out that he himself has admitted his almost total ignorance of the Blackbacked Woodpecker's habits, having had, according to him, only a short association with this rare and local species. As such, he is also not in a position to either defend or attack the validity of the allegation posed against this woodpecker. I would also like to clarify that I do not associate this proposed destructive habit with just any woodpecker, but only with the Blackbacked, as is evident from the subtitle to my note. I am well aware of the general food habits of the woodpecker family which are almost totally beneficial and therefore would be only too happy if this dubious allegation were to be conclusively disproved. I would also like to assure Mr Neelakantan that I am quite familiar with the type of damage inflicted on the fruit of the coconut tree by rats and squirrels (both of which are present in our estate) and that the holes made in a few fallen nuts inspected by me could not be attributed to these menacing rodents. Whereas it is true that my article was based mostly on second hand information from the villagers and my friend, it is to be noted that these persons stand by their observations, and we cannot summarily reject them, however inadequate or fallible, without first giving them the benefit of the doubt for the time being and carefully considering the problem with personal first hand scrutiny of the bird's food habits. I share with Mr Neelakantan an immense love for our birds and a deep concern for their conservation, but every coin has two sides to it and quite a few of our bird species are almost as destructive to man's economy as they are beneficial. It is up to us bird-loving rustics and gentry to establish the correct economic status of our different bird species by careful observation and experiment and thus clear the doubts and views held by the overwhelming percentage of our population in the rural areas who are not interested as much in watching birds for pleasure as in watching to see that they keep off their crops.

Incidentally, I have just returned from a further trip to our estate near Yelburga and was sorry to note that nearly all the nuts were harvested recently. In my stay of 10 days there, I did not see a single woodpecker of any species and was not able to get any concrete information on the trip.

In conclusion, I am afraid I cannot oblige Mr Neelakantan by promising not to shoot a bird in future, as we 'rustics and amateur naturalists' have to unfortunately support our observations of uncommon birds doing unfamiliar things or turning up in odd places by having some proof to back them such as a greasy skin of a once resplendent avian. But, I assure him that the next time I bag a Black-backed Woodpecker, I shall not fail to delve into the gooey stomach contents and let him know of its ingredients.

DO ANY FALCONS BUILD THEIR OWN NESTS?

Salim Ali

Has any of your readers observed any species of falcon building its own nest from start to finish and then raising its family in it? The term 'falcon' covers species Nos. 204 to 224 in Ripley's Synopsis and in Volume 1 of Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan.

Disagreeing with some of our statements in the Handbook under 'Breeding' an internationally renowned ornithologist comments that he is not aware of a single species of the Falconidae that builds its own nest; they invariably utilize old nests of crows, kites, etc., and the most they may do is to repair them by adding a few sticks. Therefore a falcon seen carrying a stick is by itself no proof of nest-building.

I must admit that in cases of the above nature I had hitherto uncritically taken it for granted that the nests were built by the birds themselves, though I have also commonly found falcons occupying the disused nests of other birds. However, in the case of one pair of Redheaded Merlins (Falco chicquera) I was able to watch the nest from its commencement through various later stages until young were being fed in it, so I can be positive this nest at least was self-built. How much of an exception it may be I cannot say. If anyone has watched, and can vouch for a falcon (any species) building its own nest, as against merely repairing and appropriating an old one, I shall be grateful for the evidence.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Readers are particularly requested to cooperate in the research on the nesting of Falcons suggested by Dr Salim Ali. Birds of prey are a group which are extremely difficult to identify unless a great deal of effort is made to study their different methods of flight, wing-patterns, colour markings, etc. By pursuing the project, members

will get an opportunity to get better acquainted with this difficult group of birds.

CORRESPONDENCE

Birdwatching at a garden tap

Due to physical handicaps my birdwatching is now limited to sitting in one place and see the bird fly past or watch them on the neighbouring trees. But recently my luck broke out. May in Delhi is wicked and this year it was worse with the mercury consistently registering 115° F and the hot winds literally blasting away for all their worth, till early hours of the morning. Burning hot is the word. And to add misery to misery, the proverbially letting down Delhi water supply undertaking came out in flying colours from the bottom.

Now the garden tap in our lawn has a long hose or rather a rubber tubing attached to it, used for watering far away plants and water trickles through it in drops and droplets as the casing is not watertight. To this watering place the birds swarm during the hot part of the day to quench their thirst. There is literally a regular stream of these feathery visitors and I have the opportunity of watching them from close quarters as the tap is hardly 10 yards from where I sit in the mornings. No bins are needed at such a close range.

Among the visitors are a dozen or more Redvented Bulbuls, half a dozen quarrelsome Common Mynas, which fight with other birds for the pride of place; a set of Yellow-eyed Rabblers which live in the garden; 2 pairs Ashy Wren-Warblers; 3 Tailor Birds; one Golden Oriole which has a nest in the nearby neem tree; five House Crows; a pair of Redcheeked Bulbuls which have taken their residence in our garden and which are nesting in our hedge. They come so regularly that I am sure they are taking water to their chicks. Almost all the sparrows of the vicinity are here, and a solitary kingfisher also turns up occasionally to show there is no ill feeling. Quite a tally? What?

It Col. A. David
'Officers' Qr, A/1
Old Police Lines, Delhi 6

Investigations in food and feeding habits of some birds of agriculture

I would be obliged if the readers of the Newsletter could help me by sending 2 to 5 Bayas (Ploceus philippinus) and Common Mynas (Acrideres tristis) of their locality fixed in spirit or formalin within one hour of shot or capture in the field. The following details should also be forwarded: (1) Date of capture or shot; (2) Locality, district, State; (3) Hour of shot or capture. The entire cost would be borne by me.

S. Sengupta
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, W. Bengal

Zafar Rutehally,
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COMMENTS ON THE ARTICLE 'SOME NOTES ON THE AVIFAUNA OF KATHMANDU, NEPAL WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A NUMBER OF BIRDS OF PREY' BY DR V. M. GALUSHIN, UNESCO EXPERT, DELHI (NEWSLETTER 10(8):4-6

Robert L. Fleming, Sr

Some of the surprising observations made by Dr Galushin during his short visit to Kathmandu last April, has prompted this brief note. He outlines the common species of Kathmandu well. House Sparrows live in the congested parts of the city where there is little or no vegetation. As one moves out from the centre of town, Tree Sparrows become more common until they almost completely replace House Sparrows. The House Sparrow-Tree Sparrow ratio is about 1 to 8 around our house (on the outskirts of Patan city).

Swallows follow much the same pattern as Sparrows with Striated Swallows roving over open fields and Barn Swallows, mostly, flying over city streets.

Roseringed Parakeets do not normally occur in the Kathmandu Valley. Sometimes they are imported from the plains and sold on Kathmandu streets by hawkers. We have noticed on several occasions that soon after one of these periodic sales drives parties of five or six birds suddenly appear to eat the cones of cypress trees in our yard. Could these birds have been purposely liberated or were they accidentally let go by their purchasers? Slatyheaded Parakeets (Psittacula himala-

yana) are seen in the surrounding hills and sometimes do sweep into wooded groves in Kathmandu City.

As Dr Galushin points out both Redvented and Whitecheeked bulbuls are found here. It is unusual to see the Whitecheeked near Kathmandu City; they usually prefer the hillside slopes some six miles from the city. Redvented Bulbuls are quite common here.

The only swift we have seen over the Kathmandu City is Apus affinis. Sometimes Apus pacificus hawks insects over the grassy ridges surrounding the Valley. Kakani, 16 miles NNW. of Kathmandu is a favourite place for them. Apus melba, a fairly distinctive swift has not been seen here yet.

We were interested to see that Dr Galushin reports three bird species that we have yet to find in the Kathmandu Valley. Our Valley list, developed over the past 18 years includes 376 species; now we have three more to look out for. Meanwhile, though, we offer these comments:

The Indian Robin is rare in Nepal; the only known specimens were collected within yards of the Indian border in south Nepal. Significantly, Dr Galushin does not report any Saxicolas during his morning walks. They are common here. Similarly, Prinias are not known from the Valley Floor. The Brown Hill Warbler (Prinia criniger) is found on hillsides where there is scrub jungle. The Tailor Bird, which does look something like a Prinia, is common around Kathmandu.

About two hundred yards behind the 'Egret' tree mentioned by Dr Galushin is a pond around on which Night Herons nest. The birds arrive here in the spring, nest and then depart in the fall. Young Night Herons, which look something like Green herons, frequent the Rani Pokhari pool in front of Durbar High School as well as one of the tall trees above the compound wall near the street. Our records for the Little Green Heron in Nepal do not bring it higher than Phewa Tal, Pokhara at 2800 feet.

A tree, covered with bougainvillea at Kaiser Mahal, across from the Royal Palace is the nesting site for Cattle Egrets; we have yet to see Little Egrets here as reported by Dr Galushin. Year after year, 50 or more Cattle Egret pairs adorn the branches of this tree. At the moment (August) adult birds are often off in the field while numbers of young birds as large as their parents remain in the tree during the day.

Stuart Baker and Salim Ali do not mention that the bills of these young birds are grey, some darker than others. One failing to see yellow bills might mistake these young birds for Little Egrets. Nonetheless, there would be very few young birds around during the last part of April.

Our Vulture population is a shifting one. Practically all are gone during the winter, but reappear in mid-spring and remain during the monsoon season. The occurrences of vultures in Kathmandu Valley might be summarized thus:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Fairly common | : Longbilled and Whitebacked |
| 2. Occasional | : Black and Himalayan Griffon |
| 3. Scarce | : Cinereous, Scavenger and Bearded. |

The occasional and scarce species usually appear here as solitary birds; only rarely do we see perhaps two together. We have yet to find Vultures resting in the Valley, although they are common in low-land Nepal. The Himalayan Griffon, as far as we have noted, picks nesting sites high on some inaccessible cliff. To find them resting in Kathmandu City, as stated by Dr Galushin, would be both a surprise and an ecological shock.

We do not know the breeding density of Kites in Kathmandu City and Dr Galushin has certainly stirred up our interest. We have seen a maximum of seven Kites circling together; 50 breeding pairs for the City would likely be towards the maximum figure.

A Footnote regarding the Purple Sunbird in Kathmandu

Just a short added note about the Purple Sunbird about which I commented in an earlier Newsletter (Vol. 9, No. 8: 10). Sunbirds do not breed in our Valley but appear here on or about the first of June every year. I had assumed that they made a long terai crossing and mounted up over the Outer Himalayas to reach Kathmandu Valley.

Recently a new road from China has been constructed connecting Kathmandu with Lhasa. From Kathmandu this road first runs 42 miles eastward and then at the Sun Kosi river it swings northeast to the Nepal-Tibet border. This March we camped along the road on the banks of the Sun Kosi where we found Purple Sunbirds singing loudly but frequently stopping to sip nectar from the red blossoms of Woodfordia. Two were constructing a nest near our camp site. I would now assume that when nesting chores are over, it is these birds living along the Sun Kosi and Trisuli rivers that make a short hop over a ridge and into the Kathmandu Valley

BIRDS AT NASRAPUR

Thomas Gay

Feeling the need to 'escape' for a couple of days, I fled to the Spiritual Life Centre at Nasrapur, 22 miles south of Poona on N.H.4. And on this mid September visit I discovered, as I had somehow failed to do on earlier occasions, an extra magic arising from the Centre's abundant bird life. The room assigned to me was in an isolated cottage backed by a garden with high ficus and gul mohr trees; in front, a strip of mixed teak forest lay between me and the Murganga stream; while to my right the forest stretched away to open plough-land with deep-grassed meadows beyond. Further behind me stood thick wood arching over long pools and runnels; and beyond these lay terraced rice fields, more grassy meadows, and the standing millet crops of Nasrapur village.

A short stroll on the evening of my arrival provided a list of sixteen different species. Every second tree, it seemed, gave forth the smoring of Spotted Doves, while the croaking of Painted Partridges rang from all sides. Within a space of five minutes I watched, from

close at hand, a flock of Small Minivets, a Rufous Turtle-dove, and an incredible energetic Mahratta Woodpecker (female) rushing about the trunk and branches of a batool. Soon after, I watched cock Weaver birds in all their yellow glory swoop down upon heads of millet, and picked out a Painted Partridge hunting over a bare field on the further slope of anarrow valley. As I approached a stream in the fading light, a Green Sandpiper was bobbing along the water's margin below a steep bank, and a Blue Flycatcher flew up from somewhere and vanished in a thorn-bush.

My last observation was the silhouette of a Painted Partridge croaking to the oncoming night from the horizontal branch of a silk-cotton tree, not twenty paces from the last of the cattle-sheds. Till late at night I could hear the pi-piyaha of a Brain-fever Bird mingling with the low water noises and the whisper of the forest breeze.

While consuming my chota hazri next morning, I became aware of a White-eye's nest in a perpendicular spray of antigonum, just in front of my veranda. I watched both parents bringing insects to appease the frantic little orange gapes thrust at them, and noticed how one parent nearly always remained and brooded the chicks until the mate returned. A torn grey leaf, it seemed, fluttered from a branch, and suddenly swung up again in a perfect U; and then I found that the trees were swarming with Fantail Flycatchers. These exquisite fairy dancers were about me all the day; and at twilight I managed to stand still enough to watch one bathing in a tiny pool scarcely six feet away.

I was less pleased to find the woods full also of Crow-Pheasants, of whom a poet is at this very moment writing

Never more mard'rous throat
Gave forth a richer note.

A pair of these birds were building their bulky nest in the flowery crown of a teak tree below my cottage, where I could watch one of the coucals flapping and thrusting to shape the unruly twigs. Later, on my morning walk I came upon five Crow-Pheasants close enough to each other to suggest a single gang. It is yet another sign of the tameness of the birds in this 'Little Heaven' that the pair building in the teak tree approached the place in the most carefree — even noisy — fashion, with none of the elaborate and silent stealth which I have hitherto observed in all coucals' approaches to the nest. On one occasion, one bird even emitted a hoot as it alighted upon the twiggy mass.

From one side came the fluting of an Oriole, from the opposite direction the caw of a Jungle Crow and the tonk of a Coppersmith, while a well-known little song of great vigour drew my eyes to a Tailor Bird almost in front of me. Chota hazri was finished at last, and teasing myself with the utmost difficulty from all that could be seen just from my cottage veranda, I set out for the morning walk. Up in the grasslands I heard the clear calling of a Painted Partridge from a hundred yards away, and eventually made out the caller as he sat, confident and careless, on the branch of a leafless bombax. Walking

across a repped field, I sent a little covey of Quail scuttling before me. A little while later, I had to tell myself firmly 'There is no such bird as a pale-green Paradise Flycatcher'; and soon my glasses solved the mystery: a Spotted Munia flying along the hedge with a long grass-blade trailing and waving behind it.

I watched five Roseringed Parakeets fluttering and screaming round the bare top of a dying jambul tree, and was just in time to see a Crow-Pheasant seize and fly away with a fairly large lizard. I was detained for a while trying to spot a pair of Ioras in a tree under which I passed (surely these are among the very hardest of all birds to pick out from the thick green foliage in which they love to spend their time). But the loveliest sight of the whole walk was a Grey Wagtail tripping along the bank of a stream, twisting this way and that, leaping into the air, and seeming almost to ask the whole world whether it had ever seen a more gorgeous primrose waistcoat. I thought, as the sight of any Wagtail always makes me think, that in all the tribe of birds there is no more faultlessly graceful creature than this.

A FEW WADERS EARLY INTO BOMBAY

D. A. Stairmand

This evening, 2/viii, while returning from Khandala, I stopped at the Salt Pans along the Bombay Expressway and was fortunate to see

- 2 Redshanks (Tringa totanus)
- 3 Little Stints (Calidris minutus)
- 1 Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos)

All these birds appeared to be in summer dress which was not surprising, considering the date. The Redshanks' upper breasts were quite heavily streaked with brown; the Little Stints had noticeable rufous coloration — particularly above, and the Common Sandpiper was darker than usual.

The Common Sandpiper is well known to have odd non-breeding examples over-summer in winter quarters, and indeed I saw flights of 6 and 5 of these birds on 11.vii and 12.vii respectively this year at Erangal, Marve, but, taking into consideration the coloration, the Bombay Salt Pans bird may well have been a fresh arrival.

Although I have never spent much time there, the Bombay Salt Pans appear to contain many waders and other birds, particularly in September/October and during the winter season. Just after the monsoon ended last year I was able to see several immature Reef Herons (Egretta gularis) — birds in which I have a great 'local' interest at Beach Candy and Hornby Vellard, when they are there from September-May — at close quarters and waders, of various species, were occasionally in good numbers.

I often stop along the Salt Pans for a few minutes when I see some Little Egrets or Smaller Egrets, as I did this evening, and almost

invariably other birds are around. In 15 minutes this evening, besides the egrets and waders, I noted Redwattled Lapwings, a Streaked Fantail Warbler, Brahminy Kites — mature and immature — and an unseen object that moved through the grass of the bund on which I was walking.

BIRDS IN A BENGAL GARDEN

F. M. Gauntlett

East is east and west is west but the most startling difference is the number of birds in my Bengal garden compared with that in the northwest London suburb of Harrow. During three years' observation in my tiny garden in Harrow I recorded 21 species including those flying over. In a shorter period in Bengal I have seen over 100 species more than this. Oddly enough, all but five of the Harrow species are on the Indian list. In Harrow my garden was only a twentieth of an acre or less but was one of several such plots totalling about 2½ acres. In Durgapur my well-wooded garden is 2/3rd acre and is separated from similar gardens by thick hedges of hibiscus, bougainvillea, lantana and sal trees and is connected by a narrow jungle corridor to the last remnant of the original sal forest of the area.

The permanent residents or regular visitors which can be seen in the garden on any day in the year are Spotted Dove, Koel, Redvented and Redwhiskered bulbuls the most obvious members, Jerdon's Chloropsees, Common Iora, Jungle Babbler, Indian Robin, Magpie Robin, Tailor Bird, Purple Sunbird, House Sparrow, Spotted Munia, Common Myna, Pied Myna, Blackheaded Oriole, Black Drongo, House Crow and Tree Pie. These are birds of the garden itself but Whitebacked Vultures and Black Kites, sorry, Pariah Kite as it is called here, are always to be seen overhead. The Little Nightjar is also resident but is only heard at certain seasons.

Birds which occur regularly but a little less frequently than those in the previous group are Cattle Egret, White-eyed Buzzard, Shikra, Ring Dove (this has suddenly become a common British bird in the past 10 years where it is known as the Collared Dove, its Indian name being occasionally used for another species), Green Parakeet (why do all the books have to be so long-winded and call it Roseringed?), Crow Pheasant, Palm Swift, Green Bee-eater, Crimsonbreasted Barbet which should now be promoted to the first group because it has already raised one family on the premises and is excavating a hole for another, Golden-backed Woodpecker, Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker which spend a month excavating a hole and then gave up, Common Wood Shrike, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Ashy Wren-Warbler, Baya Weaver, Whitethroated Munia, Ashy Swallow Shrike and Jungle Crow.

Other species become quite common at certain times of year only to depart again later. With the arrival of the hot weather in March come Golden Orioles, Paradise Flycatchers, Blackheaded and Large Cuckoo-Shrikes. It is also an interesting time of year for migrant winter visitors returning north, particularly Flyth's Reed Warbler, occasion-

ally Forest Wagtail and single records of Bright Green Leaf Warbler, Blyth's Crowned Leaf Warbler, Greycheeked Flycatcher-warbler, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, and Bluethroated Blue Flycatcher. The cuckoos also begin to tune up with Common Hawk-Cuckoo, Indian Cuckoo and Plaintive Cuckoo making a noisy chorus. The arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo heralds the imminent monsoon.

With the monsoon, there is a frantic burst of nest building activity amongst the bulbuls, munias, sparrows and mynas and there is a regular overhead traffic of Little Cormorants, large, lesser and little Egrets, Night Herons and Paddy Birds and Lesser Whistling Teal changing feeding grounds. It is also at about this time that a small party of Rufousbellied Rabblers put in an appearance and Tickell's and

Thickbilled Flowerpeckers raid a small fruiting tree called a 'cherry' by my gardening friends. (It is not a true cherry but some reader will be able to identify it for me from the description given at the end of this note.) Parties of three species of tern; Whiskered, Blackbellied and River fly over from time to time as do the Openbill Storks and Brahminy Kite. Sometimes Redwattled Lapwings and Little Pratincoles pass over but the passage of Wood Sandpipers and ducks such as Teal indicates the arrival of winter visitors is underway and for the next few months there will be new denizens of the garden of which the earliest and commonest is the Brown Shrike. This is soon joined by Wren ck, Yellowbrowed Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Chiffchaff, Black Redstart, Redbreasted Flycatcher, Indian Tree Pipit, Swallow, Redrumped Swallow, Orangeheaded Ground Thrush, Grey Drongo and for the last winter only, a Whitebellied Drongo.

There is a long list of birds which are of only occasional occurrence. Whitenecked Stork, Longbilled Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Crested Hawk-Eagle, Crested Honey Buzzard, Kestrel, Hoopoe, Roller, Whitebreasted Kingfisher have all been seen flying over. Birds seen in the garden itself were Common Bustard Quail, Blossomheaded Parakeet, Collared Scops Owl (heard only), Longtailed Nightjar, Greyheaded Myna (seen more frequently than most in this group), Booted Warbler, Franklin's Wren Warbler, Yellowthroated Sparrow, Verditer Flycatcher and Haircrested Drongo.

Sometimes a stray bird stays in the vicinity for several days such as an Egyptian Vulture (so much shorter than 'White Scavenger' Vulture) which was circling overhead with other vultures on and off for almost a week and a Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher which spent 3 weeks in the garden.

Finally there is a list of birds which have only put in an appearance once. These are Large Whistling Teal, Ruddy Shelduck, Booted Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Hobby, Little Brown Dove, Small Cuckoo, Green Barbet, Pygmy Woodpecker, Tickell's Thrush, Little Brown Dove and Blackheaded Shrike (twice).

The foregoing list, to which must be added the House Swift, a common hot weather and monsoon visitor which had almost got forgotten, makes a total of 124 species is quite close to the total of 134 species seen by Malcolm MacDonald in the garden of the British High

Commission in Delhi over a similar period (Birds in my Indian Garden). Two of his total of 136 are more usually regarded as only subspecies. Oddly enough only 74, or a little over half, are common to both lists. The difference must be largely due to the higher rainfall and humidity in Bengal finding less favour with those species that like a drier climate. However, only 17 of the Delhi species have not been seen by me somewhere in W. Bengal or just across the border to Bihar.

The small tree in my garden which is such an attraction for Koels, Tree Pies, Mynas, Bulbuls, Chloropses, Flowerpeckers and even crows is only 6 m tall but very fast growing reaching this height in only 3 years. The side branches grow horizontally drooping slightly, all the side shoots, which grow alternately, all in the same plane. The leaves also grow alternately, and are light green in colour, lanceolate in shape with a serrated edge, the largest being 10 cm long and 4 cm at the broadest. The upper surface is smooth and velvety to the touch. The small white flowers borne singly on stems 2.5 cm long are about 1.5 cm across. the 5 separated petals resemble tissue paper in texture. The fruit starts as a shiny green berry which turns red when ripe and is about 1 cm in diameter. It contains a sweet sap with numerous fine yellow seeds. The tree is truly evergreen producing flowers and fruit throughout the year.

It is the continuous supply of sweet berries which makes it so attractive to birds and I would strongly recommend it for the bird-watchers' garden, even if only to keep the bulbuls off the dahlias and chrysanthemums.

OCCURRENCE OF LEAST FRIGATE BIRD (FREGATA ARIEL IREDALEI MATHEWS) IN BOMBAY

Rauf Ali

On 4 June, 1970, a Least Frigate Bird, Fregata ariel, in juvenile plumage was found exhausted on a beach north of Bombay, 18°55'N., 72°50'E. On its wings were two plastic wing-tags bearing the serial number A-04.

Information now received from the British Trust for Ornithology indicated that this bird was tagged as a nestling on Aldabra Island, Indian Ocean (09°22'S., 46°28'E.) on the 18th April 1969. It was present there up to 29th August 1969.

This is the third record of this species from India, the first being of Ferguson from Trivandrum, 1904, and the second of Humayun Abdulali from Bombay 1960 (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 57: 668) though at least six examples have been taken on the west coast of Ceylon, also during the monsoon months (Indian Handbook 1: 49).

The map distance between the points of ringing and recovery in this case is c. 4400 km.

The bird is at present in the private aviaries of the Maharaja of Jannagar. It is still rather weak, and it is proposed to release it out at sea when it recovers, after marking it with the Society's ring.

IN CONTINUATION OF COCONUTS, BLACKBACKED WOODPECKERS, AMATEUR
NATURALISTS, AND RUSTICS. (ALSO QUASI-SCIENTISTS)

Levkumar J. Khacher

Mr Ghorpade's spirited defence of his earlier note and my own note appearing just before it in last month's Newsletter with the spark-igniting article of Mr Neelakantan are all very welcome in that they are a debate on a very vital aspect in which the more people get involved the better, but may I please request that no feathers should fly as a result. Such controversies if converted into friendly debates can produce much good yet if anger and sarcasm enter the repartees, which are all too possible in such debates, it is to be regretted: there are far too few of us to start going off at tangents and our meagre numbers must maintain a stolid unity if we are to continue the little good we are now doing. I say, the point at stake is not whether a woodpecker of any species is harmful or not, whether it is beneficial or not, nor is it important whether our country-folk have unscientific views or not, but that all of us have to accept a few very basic points and bear them in mind, these are

Enough destruction has been done to our biological surroundings to leave no 'other side of the coin'.

The 'rustics' are the rulers of the country by the nature of our political structure, and their opinions often will carry more force than that of any other.

These very rustics have been instrumental in producing the terrible destruction of our plant and animal life, and they themselves are suffering the most as a result of consequent cycles of droughts and fierce floods.

There are still many, far too many well to do 'sportsmen' who destroy whatever little there is and subvert our game laws with impunity.

The country abounds in snobs who pay for roast partridge and peafowl out of season and who, with aplomb, serve venison to their guests.

It is therefore an absolute necessity that the very few of us who know and feel should close our ranks and go all out for the cause of conservation. We must make this an article of faith and permit no self doubts.

The irony of the entire situation came vividly to me when a few days back I was strolling with Jalsirbhhai Raul in the open spaces behind my house on the outskirts of Rajkot. Despite the wonderful monsoon rains, there was not a blade of grass for domesticated animals to eat and these had ribs showing. Yet if these acres were closed by government to permit grass to grow there would be a hue and cry by the rustics for whom there would be grass to cut and stall-feed their animals through the rest of the year. Of course we saw no wild animals — beneficial, harmless, or harmful to one another, to domesticated animals, to crops or to humans. Yet the same area if closed and preserved would soon yield tall grass, there would be birds and

and other animals in numbers with enough to spare for man and his animals.

The last paragraph in Mr Ghorpade's rejoinder made me a little sad. Why is he so bent on wanting to prove the harmful nature of the Black-backed Woodpecker? Would it not be a tragic sacrifice to a small petulance or desire for self justification? A more pleasanter method of inquiry into the nature of this particular woodpecker comes to my mind. The bird should be carefully watched and if it is felt that the little scamp is indeed taking undue interest in the fruits, then the sum needed for the ammunition to 'bag' the bird would easily send a little 'rustic urchin' (possibly the future Prime Minister of the country) up the tree to inspect the fruits. He could bring down any fruit with signs of damage. Even if a hole has been bored by the woodpecker, should this be at the top of the fruit, little harm would be done for, as Mr Neelkantan says, the woodpecker's tongue is not equipped to suck up juices and so nothing could be lost. However if the fruit is damaged lower down then there is something to cry about for the scamp in reality would be tapping in on the profits of the farmer. Even so, apart from the very academic interest such observations possess, would an occasional nut pierced and sucked dry, if at all, outweigh the immense good done by the same bird using its barbed tongue to spear and extract grubs damaging the timber of the tree bearing the coconut so damaged? The rustic could well discuss this point and I am certain he would cast his valuable vote in favour of the woodpecker.

We naturalists, largely amateurs since professionals are all but non-existent in this country, must rally all our powers of persuasion and get every shade of opinion in support of the cause of conservation. It is better to have a few rogue woodpeckers than to have none at all and besides the rustic farmer has little to worry about as he is getting a very inflated price for his coconuts and to the consumers, and to himself, a few coconuts more or less will mean nothing to the losses of the former and the profits of the latter.

Finally a point concerning the quasi-scientific attitude. Enough skins repose in collections all over the world to make their further acquisition redundant, and even if there is coconut milk inside the gizzard of a bird, it would not be identifiable.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

One interesting study which readers of the Newsletter can carry out without much trouble is to assess the presence of various species of birds in urban environments. It is quite extraordinary how many species of birds are found in the most urbanized portions of the city. In the busiest section of Bombay for instance, the Magpie Robin, Ashy Wren-Warbler, Tailor Bird, Purplerumped Sunbird, Copper-smith, Wagtails and many others appear to be settled happily, wherever there is a little open space and greenery. The Editor's garden in the suburbs is now completely surrounded by tall buildings on all sides. Yet the flock of Common Green Bee-eaters which have been com-

ing to the area every September ever since the days when the place was wild and uninhabited, arrived punctually this season also. Some trees and shrubs are of course necessary and with a little imaginative planning these can be provided almost anywhere.

Will readers staying in crowded cities please send in a list of the birds they see in their locality? It might help us to arrive at some interesting conclusions on the basis of this data.

CORRESPONDENCE

Mongoose as a predator

Right from my childhood I have always associated the mongoose with the Black Cobra. Ricky-ticky-Tavy of Kipling is still fresh in my memory. But I never thought what a terror it is to the eggs and young of birds till I saw it myself.

The small lawn in front of our house is hedged with Mehdi which is about 8 feet high and quite thick and usually forms the nesting place of about half a dozen common birds: the Tailor Bird, the Ashy Wren-Warbler, the Redvented Bulbul and the Little Dove. The nests are always there and there are usually eggs in them, and the birds could be seen sitting therein. I have also seen young chicks come out but I have never seen them grow and always after a few days they mysteriously disappear. I had often wondered at the cause of the sudden disappearance, but could never find it out till I saw the mongoose doing the damage. There is a mongoose in the garden. I is not scared of us and often comes close to us. In May I saw it climb a pole of the barbed wire fencing and deftly jump about a couple of yards at the nest of the Little Brown Dove. The mother was sitting in it and under it were three small chicks. Needless to say that the mongoose badly crippled the mother and polished away the chicks with relish.

Lt. Col. A. David
Officers' Qr., A/1 Old Police Lines
Delhi 6

Jungle Mynas and their nests

Nesting of a flock of the Jungle Myna observed since last week of April. These ignored species rather neglected creatures selected their site for nesting in the holes on the stone built walls of the railway tunnels on the Kalka-Simla Light Railway tract.

In the tunnel No. 36, 37 and 38 near Solan, those nests were located on the holes at interval of 3 feet at the height of about 8 feet from ground.

The material for construction of nest is mostly soft fine fibre which comes from logs of pine wood which are still abundant due to the presence of two timber sawing mills, nearby. The inner lining of the nest was dry pine leaves.

Behaviour and essential points regarding nesting are more or less like Common Mynas.

R. N. Mukherjee
Simla Hills

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FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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BIRD NOTES FROM JOMSON, NORTH NEPAL

Robert L. Fleming, Jr

Jomsom has been the destination of many recent trekkers in Nepal.

Where it is? What is it like? Are there many interesting birds there? These are questions likely to be asked by active bird enthusiasts visiting Nepal.

in, Jomsom is the Nepal desert. Desert? Well, not quite. Jomsom receives an average of about 27.5 cm (11.0 inches) of rainfall per year. Nonetheless, the brown scenery with low thorn bushes dotting the landscape is very reminiscent of a desert.

And yet it is a place for birds. Not the thousands, perhaps, that one sees at Bharatpur Sanctuary in Rajasthan, but a place for special high altitude and Tibetan species.

To reach Jomsom one should count on about twelve days to make the round trip; birds are all along the way. One starts the journey by flying from Kathmandu to Pokhara, a beautiful valley at 3000 feet altitude. Here one may relax at the edge of Lake Phewa and watch (in winter) the Great Crested Grebes (Podiceps cristatus) diving in the clear water, or he may stroll along the wide paths and observe Haircrested Drongos (Dicrurus hottentottus) in the Simul (Bombax) trees.

After engaging porters in Pokhara, one strikes northwestward. The mountain views along this trail are as spectacular as anything I have seen in the Himalayas (Machapuchare towers 20,000 ft above the observer, Annapurna I, 23,000 ft above).

At first the path follows cultivated valley with Kestrels (Falco tinnunculus) hovering over the rice fields. Naudanda village perches on the crest of the first ridge and offers protection for Striated and Common Swallows (Hirundo daurica and H. rustica). We saw two Lammergeiers (Gypaetus barbatus) cruising along together over the Naudanda ridge during our recent March visit.

One moves along the Naudanda ridge now, through Lamle where the grassy slopes hide loudly calling Upland Pipits (Anthus sylvanus), then down through remnant forest harbouring Large Yellownaped Woodpeckers (Picus flavinucha), to Birethanthi village.

Now the path swings up along a small stream. This mountain torrent, though, is large enough to have its complement of Brown Dippers (Cinclus pallasii) and Whitecapped River Chats (Chaimarrornis leucocephalus). Inviting pools beckon during the noonday heat and just before turning up the steep climb to Ulleri, we sampled the none-too-comfortable, ice cold water.

Above Ulleri the trail rounds a bend and suddenly plunges into dense oak forest. Here are numerous mid-Himalayan birds: Nepal Sunbirds (Aethopyga nipalensis), Blackcapped Sibilas (Heterophasia capistrata), Yellowbrowed Titmice (Parus modestus) and Stripethroated Yuhina (Yuhina gularis). March is a fine time to walk through this forest as the Tree Rhododendron (R. arboreum) is in full bloom. Some flowers near the Ghorpani Pass (at 9000 feet) were pink rather than brilliant red. At other places in Nepal, flowers of the same species are white! The view from the pass is spectacular. Dhaulagiri (26,850 feet), across the Kali Gandak valley, looks surprisingly near. Annapurna I is so close it is hidden by the massive ice walls above us.

Now one descends through oak and rhododendron forests, passing a few magnolias in bloom, to the village of Sikha. Then on past scrubby hillsides to Tatopani (4000 feet altitude) on the banks of the Gandaki river. Bathing at the hot springs is possible, but the water has to be cooled before using.

The Gandaki valley has surprisingly few birds to offer here. The valley is enclosed in steep, nearly treeless slopes which is not ideal habitat except for a few Brown Hill Warblers (Prinia criniger). Plumbeous Redstarts (Rhyacornis fuliginosus) caught insects near the water.

Above Dana the path branches and becomes more interesting. The left trail (along the true right bank of the river) clings to the gorge cliffs in a most exciting manner. Along here we saw Himalayan Griffons (Gyps himalayensis) resting on their cliff perches. The right fork, on the other hand, is prosaic but is not passable in the monsoon as it involves crossing the Kali Gandaki on a temporary bridge. The right fork boasts a grove of Alders (Alnus nepalensis) in which we saw Greenbacked Titmice (Parus monticolus), Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warblers (Seicercus xanthoschistos), and a Brownfronted Pied Woodpecker (Dendrocopos auriceps).

Now one enters the land of the hospitable Thakdhali. Lower ~~Thak~~ is well forested with Blue Pine (Pinus griffithi) and Maples (Acer). A thick understory of dwarf bamboo (Arundinaria) provides suitable habitat for many birds. Here one finds Chestnutheaded Tit-Babblers (Alcippe castaneiceps), Redheaded Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax erythrocephalus) and Rufousnecked Scimitar Babblers (Pomatorhinus ruficollis). Summer visitors, already here by mid March, included

the Verditer Flycatcher (Muscicapa thalassina) and the Dark Grey Bush Chat (Saxicola ferrea).

In March, Rosefinches were abundant all along the trail; they are surely one of the highlights of a Jomsom trek. Beautiful Rosefinches (Carpodacus pulcherrimus) were seen at 5500 feet, while Pinkbrowed (C. rhodochrous) and Nepal (C. nipalensis) were in Ghasa Village at 6000 feet. Spotwinged Rosefinches (C. rhodopeplus) lurked in the forest at 7000 feet, as did Redheaded (Propyrrhula subhimachala). A rosefinch of spectacular proportions, the Eastern Great (C. rubicilloides) occupied the hedgerows of Jomsom in pairs and small parties. They were wary and perched on bush-tops to watch us pass.

The walk from Iate to Jomsom is surely one of the most interesting a naturalist in the Himalayas can have. Here, within a span of only ten miles, he emerges from the moist, pine-covered south Himalayan slopes, passes between two giant peaks, and then plunges into the rain-shadow desert north of the Himalayan system.

Plant life changes abruptly; bird life less so. Frequent parties of Redbilled Choughs (P. pyrrhonorax) feed in the fields as Robin Accentors (Prunella rubeculoides) perch in the hedgerows. The fields of barley and wheat are green oases in the brown landscape. Birds gravitate here.

We arrived in Jomsom under threatening skies. The next day it snowed slightly. In March, though, it was surprisingly warm; in mid-winter it can be bitter here. We spent two days examining the birds of the Jomsom area -- especially in the fields and hedge rows of Jomsom and neighbouring Thini village.

Birdwatching at Jomsom is not an all day affair. One has to rise early and make as much haste as possible for from about 9.30 a.m. onwards, bird activity begins to slow down. Early in the morning they appear to be everywhere -- sitting on tops of small bushes, scurrying about on the ground, or flying swiftly from one apricot tree to another. By 10 a.m. most of them seem to have disappeared.

Where do they go? What causes them to behave so differently from birds in other places? The answer is not visible -- at least not directly -- but is 'feelable'. Wind. From mid-morning to late afternoon a strong wind sweeps off of Thaulagiri and rushes northwards along the Gandaki Valley, reaching a speed of over 50 m.p.h. at times. Birds have adapted to this climatic condition so that after ~~ten~~ they confine their activities to crouching behind or working around beneath protecting bushes or stones. . It may seem as though no birds are here at all but as soon as one climbs over a slight rise, he may startle any number of rosefinches, warblers, accentors, and thrushes from the bushes in front. The birds make a hurried getaway, aided as they are by the wind, to the next protecting rise.

In March we were already too late to see some of the wintering rosefinches and other high altitude birds. Some were still around though, such as the Whitethroated Redstarts (Phoenicurus schisticeps), the Eastern Great Rosefinch, and Brown Accentors (Prunella fulvescens). Brown Accentors look for all the world like bush chats as

they perch on top of hedges in the early morning sunshine. Their conspicuous black 'mask' is reminiscent of the Dark Grey Bush Chat. We found these Accentors, which are rare in Nepal and known from only the Jomsom and Muktinath regions, relatively confiding. They occurred singly and spent much time hopping about stonewalls and under hedges bordering the fields. When disturbed, their flight is amazingly rapid — much more so than bush chats'.

Another common bird here was the Redthroated Thrush (Turdus r. ruficollis). In Nepal this bird, in its Blackthroated (T. r. atrogularis) form, is frequent in the south Himalayas; the redthroated variety is definitely note. Significantly we did not see any Blackthroated Thrushes here. It would appear that in Central Nepal, the Redthroated Thrush winters north of the main Himalayas, while the blackthroated type continues on south. These birds devote much time to hopping on the ground looking for food.

A word about the Tibetan Tit-Warbler (Leptopoeecile sophiae). This light sandy-coloured warbler with a contrasting lavender rump haunts bushes and hedges around Momo. We found them quite frequent during our December visit, but not especially common during March. Our friend an excellent birdwatcher Shri Deva Mur Singh of Jomsom, says that these birds are migratory and spend only winters here. More information on seasonal movements of this warbler in Nepal is needed.

Thus, although there may not be an overwhelming number of birds in this unusual area, the species that do live here are of special interest. The birds combined with grand mountain views and the friendly people all make this trek most memorable.

BIRD OBSERVATION IN SUNABEDA

S. K. Sen

My bird study, still being in the alphabetical stage, mainly consists of identification of different species, as I have been able to do in Sunabeda, during my stay there for one and a half year.

Sunabeda is a small village in the district of Koraput in Orissa. The area is traversed by a highway, only on one side of which is the village. On the other side a small industrial township has grown up. The area is a sort of valley studded with low hills and is about 2500 ft from the sea level and 80 miles from the sea coast. The general scenery consist of rather barren hills, low shrubs and scrub bushes scattered all over the area. Occasionally there are, few trees, particularly cashew nuts planted by the forest department. During rains the whole area get covered with all kinds of wild grasses. During my stay, I walked around a radius of 5-7 miles spotting birds. There were, of course, lot of birds coming into the township.

Like all other places, House Crows (Corvus splendens), House Sparrow (Passer domesticus) and Common Myra (Acridotheres tristis), are as numerous as anywhere else. Second commonest are Cattle Egrets (Bubul-

cus ibis). These yellowbilled egrets are quite numerous attending to grazing cattle in the fields and hillsides. In the evening they disappear.

There are several winter visitors to Sunabeda of which Wagtails and Swallows are most conspicuous. These birds come to Sunabeda around October and leave about March. I have seen flocks of wagtails in the lawns, foraging and flying about in their characteristic manner. Most numerous are Grey Wagtails (Motacilla caspica), but there were occasional White Wagtails (M. alba) and Large Pied Wagtails (M. madaraspatensis). I also saw two Yellow Wagtails (M. flava), one was completely yellow but the other was yellow only in the rear part. There were some Indian Pipits (Anthus novaeseelandiae) mixed among the wagtails. Pipits look rather like the female sparrows but slightly bigger and more streamlined.

Swallows come in plentiful during November. All three kinds, Redrumped Swallow (Hirundo daurica), Common (H. rustica), Wiretailed (H. smithi). They keep on flying in circles catching insects. While flying sometime they come quite close, when one can see their colour and the wire of the tail. The colour of their plumage is a beautiful blue, particularly of the wire-tailed variety. For some odd reason, swallows come in flocks to the lawns when the weather is dull and cloudy. Wagtails flock in if it is bright and sunny.

Other species that are commonly found in the township are: Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis), Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans). Once I saw a beautiful brown small hawk which I thought was a young Shikra (Accipiter badius). Once I also spotted a Redheaded Merlin (Falco chicquera) sitting on an electric pole. Nightjar (Caprimulgus asiaticus) are often encountered in the evenings sitting in the middle of the roads. On approach they fly away silently.

On the east side of the town there is a hill studded with cashewnut trees. One of the tree was colonised by a group of Pied Myna (Sturnus contra), roosting and were very noisy. One part of the hill was occupied by Indian Robins (Saxicoloides fulicata); they started a chorus early in the morning which continued long after dusk! They were probably nesting but I could never find a nest. This was in the month of March-April.

Pied Bush Chats (Sericola caprata) were also commonly found all over the town.

The south side of the town is not built up. The southern limit of the town is by an artificial lake produced by a dam inundating low lands. A walk along the lake in the morning, one encounters number of different birds. There were Redwattled Lapwing (Vanellus indicus), suddenly starting to scream and fly about when disturbed. Sitting on the shrubs and hiding in the bushes were Redvented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer), Grey Shrikes (Lanius excubitor), Common Shrike (Tephrodornis pondicerianus) and Rufousbacked Shrike (Lanius schach). Shrikes are easy to identify from their bill. There were also several shy small nondescript birds I could not identify.

The lake is rather shallow with bare trees projecting out of the water. Sitting on one of such bare tree branch I identified a Common

Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis). Near the edge of the lake among the rushes I saw and identified two Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos). I also saw six small ducks floating on the lake but could not identify them.

The path along the lake joins a metalled road at its east end and I was walking towards it. In the middle of the path I came across a Hoopoe (Upupa epops) with its crest closed.

Walking along the metalled road mentioned above I saw and identified some more species of birds. On the telegraph wire were sitting Grey Shrikes and quite a few Common Green Bee-eater (Merops orientalis). These beautiful birds are quite common around Sunabeda. On a tree I spotted one Whitebellied Drongo (Dicrurus caerulescens). In size it is slightly smaller than a Black Drongo. Constant call of a bird drew my attention and I spotted a Crimsonbreasted Barbet (Megalaima haemacephala) sitting right on the very top of a tree. On another tree I found a number of Spotted Dove (Streptopelia chinensis).

This time I had a binocular with me, so that I had good look at the species. I felt rather happy identifying all these species and thought of recording all species that are found in and around Sunabeda. Unfortunately I had to change my plans and leave the place.

BREVITY

D. A. Stairmand

Mr F. M. Gauntlett, in his very informative and interesting article, 'Birds in a Bengal Garden' Newsletter 10(10): 6-8 taken 'the books' to task for being so longwinded over bird names such as 'Roseringed' Parakeet which he indicates should be shortened to 'Green' Parakeet (as was done by Malcolm Macdonald in his Birds in my Indian Garden). Further on in Mr Gauntlett's article there occurs 'Egyptian Vulture (so much shorter than "White Scavenger" Vulture)'. I presume this remark refers to the name and not length of the bird.

I think both instances are somewhat unfortunate for is the large Indian Parakeet (Psittacula eupatria) any less a 'Green Parakeet' than the Roseringed Parakeet (Psittacula krameri)? 'Green Parakeet' would surely lead to vagueness regarding the identity of the bird and perhaps the name would have to be amplified to avoid confusion thereby negating the effect. Although the males of both these species do have rose-pink in their collars I think the present nomenclature is sufficiently well known and established to avoid any semblance of doubt in most people's mind. I would have thought that there had already been more than enough changing of bird's names — both 'common' and 'scientific'.

The case for 'Egyptian' Vulture instead of 'White Scavenger' Vulture is even more untenable. Firstly, they are not the same race as may be seen from Ind. Handbook - Vol. 1: Egyptian Vulture (Neophron percnopterus percnopterus) and Indian Scavenger Vulture (Neophron percnopterus ginginianus). It would appear that Mr Gauntlett

probably saw the Indian Scavenger Vulture and not the Egyptian Vulture as the latter is said to be confined, within our area to a great extent at least, to North West India. If we are not to quibble or be pedantic over 'race' and require brevity I suggest one word - 'Neophron' which has been used in books. Many people like the nomenclature 'Pharaoh's Chicken'.

With all due respect to Mr Gauntlett, and thanks to him for his article, I wonder whether many of us consider brevity desirable when we are reading our bird books and, incidentally, the Newsletter. Do we, in fact, need to write 'binos' which my mind always insists on rhyming with 'rhinos' and 'binocs' would probably be rhymed with 'socks' -- I would hasten to make it clear that I am not referring to Mr Gauntlett or anyone else specifically in this respect. I, personally, savour such a title in the Newsletter (October) as 'In continuation of Coconuts, Blackbacked Woodpeckers, Amateur Naturalists, and Rustics (Also Quasi-Scientists)' by Kunwar Shri Iyankumar J. Kacher, whether Prince, Esquire or just plain Mister. Pity about that cryptic 'J' though.

COCONUT AND ITS PESTS

J. S. Serrao

The defence of the Blackbacked Woodpecker has now covered three issues of the Newsletter. Before it closes down it may be interesting to recall the incident of damage by Rats to Coconut from the article THE IACCADIVES AND THE WEST COAST, by A. O. Hume (Stray Feathers 4: 413, et seq., 1876). The paragraphs narrating the remedies the administration devised and how such remedies worked are reproduced. The passages surely have a lesson for us either in our genuine or imaginary ills.

The scene is Betra-par island in the Iaccadive group.

'..... Lastly, I saw and carefully spared a pair of Southern Wood owls, (Bulaca [= Strix indranee) (though one of them sat blinking and winking at me in an exasperating fashion for several minutes); but thereby hangs a tale.

' I must explain that in some of the inhabited islands the people are much troubled with rats (Mus rufescens, as I found on securing specimens), which live up in crowns of the cocoanut palms, and incontinently drop the nuts on the heads of passers by, and otherwise seriously diminish the outturn of the trees and make themselves generally disagreeable. Our beneficent Government, anxious to succour its suffering people, first suggested cats, but the people already had cats, which, however, getting plenty of fish below, felt no call for running up 90 feet of bare cocoanut trunk in quest of rats, which they never saw or even smelt. The Government sent down a lot of snakes and mongooses; the former, the people exterminated as undesirable colonists, the latter, they put up with, but derived no great benefit from them,

seeing that mongooses are not tree climbers, and the rats stick to the crowns of the trees. I am aware that the official record claims that the mongooses drove the rats up the trees; were this a fact, they could hardly have been more unprofitably employed, it being just out of the trees that it is essential to drive the rats, but as a matter of fact the poor Herpestes (the only specimen we got was vitticollis) had nothing to do with the matter. If they did no good, at least they did no harm in this direction — since at no time did the rat ever reside anywhere than in the tree tops, and seeing that they have plenty to eat there, and nothing to eat below, it could hardly be expected that they should.

' Well, having " driven all the rats up the trees? " and I perceive from the reports that this imaginary feat was deemed a decided step in the right direction, it occurred to some one to send down a lot of Owls to drive them down again. The conception was really a grand one — between two fires, what should the wretched rats do, but curse the collector and die?

* Unfortunately, as is too commonly the case in India, popular prejudice interfered to mar the success of a paternal Government's beneficent schemes.

' When the Owls arrived, (magnificent Eagle Owls, says the report, but practically they were Wood Owls), the people were greatly exercised. " What ails the Sirkar " said the elders. " Is it not enough that they deluge us with snakes, that they flood us with long-tailed ground rats (mongooses) that kill our chickens? and now they want to afflict us with these devil birds, whose cries keep us all awake at night, and make the children scream, and the old women foretell death and ruin! Certainly we are the Sirkar's slaves — whatever they order we obey, but — we won't have the devil birds. " The upshot was, that four pairs of the Owls were taken to Betra-Par, where they might, without offence, make night hideous, and the remaining two, were let loose somewhere on the sly. It is true there are no rats on Betra-Par, and that if there were, it would not signify, but que voulez vous? the designs of a great and benevolent Government are not to be allowed to come to naught; the Owls had to be disposed of somehow; in political crises, compromises have to be accepted, and if the unfortunate and guiltless Owls transported for life to meet an untimely grave on the desolate shores of Betra-Par, do seem to have had hard measure meted to them, we must remember that everything was done with the best possible intentions, and that even in the highest states of civilization blameless individuals have at times to suffer pro bono publico. '

A hundred years after what Hume wrote, there appears to be no necessity of our experimenting the way ' the benevolent government ' of Hume's days did. In the United States the depredations done by their Sapsuckers (Sphyrapicus ruber, S. thyroides and S. varius) to cultivated apple and pear and other economic trees was estimated at \$1,200,000 as early as the first decade of the present century. Yet the extermination of the Sapsuckers was not considered. Certainly by

now the US farmer must have some methods of either eliminating or minimizing these depredations by the sapsuckers. These methods either adopted or adapted to suit our conditions here should certainly yield results in controlling the damage done by woodpeckers to coconut, if any (doubtful).

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Tenth ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India will be held some time in the middle of December 1970, and a Notice with an agenda will be circulated with the December issue of the Newsletter. It will be greatly appreciated if members write in to the Editor any particular items which they want to be discussed at the meeting and send a note about their proposals.

In the Editor's garden the Shikra arrived after the rains and was first seen on 4th October. It offered a splendid view as it sat on the edge of the water barrel with a whole troop of crows trying their best to prevent it from having a drink. Both the House- and Jungle Crows indulged in harassing the Shikra.

The bird has gleaming yellow eyes, yellow bill, with a black patch on the top of bill, yellow legs, and beautiful soft brown lines on its white underside. A black line descends vertically down the white throat. It is difficult to say whether it is a shikra or a Sparrow Hawk. Though I have no evidence I would like to believe that it is the same bird coming into the garden since the last three years. It has been suggested that the bird could be caught by dangling a lure, i.e. a frog, a mouse, or a bird on the other side of the net, strategically placed near the shikra's haunts. If the attempt is successful readers will hear about it.

Incidentally on the morning of the 30th October I saw the bird on the mango tree and was very surprised to find a number of large white spots on its back. The bird was looking very large with all its feathers ruffled and these spots are apparently on the underside of the back feathers, which are not visible when the bird is properly groomed.

A Survey of the Pesticide position in India

It is very important for us in India to get information of pesticides on the following lines:

- i. What pesticides are produced in India?
- ii. What are their uses?
- iii. What is the legislation and nature of registration of pesticides? Have any specific steps been taken to ensure that these pesticides are used with care and do not pose a hazard to wildlife?
- iv. The authorities, organisations and individuals who keep account of the ecological effect of pesticide use.

We are all aware of the dangers posed by the new chemicals, but

unless accurate data are available it is not possible to make any representations about either improving the law asking for its better implementation. Would any reader agree to act as a coordinator for this project, collect all the information and submit the data to the Editor of the Newsletter.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources is very much interested in collecting such data from different countries so that it can take action at international level.

The IUCN writes: 'Although pesticides are used in every country information about their production, the situations in which they are used, the extent of their use, their registration and control, and their ecological effects are very little known except for a few countries in the North Temperate Zone. Enough research has been done to demonstrate that pesticides are now an important ecological factor in terrestrial, freshwater and even marine ecosystems. Therefore ecological research on their effects is important from many scientific points of view. Background information on the nature and extent of pesticide use is an essential prerequisite for all research on the ecological effects of pesticides and for assessments of pesticide threats to environment.

'While pesticides have been valuable in preventative medicine and agriculture their misuse has resulted in serious side effects which have done economic damage, e.g. selection of resistant genotypes, desirability natural enemies of pests and hence the production of new problems. Greater knowledge about pesticide effects will reduce economic losses which have been due to the unwise use of pesticides.

'Apart from damage to economically valuable species pesticides have also done much harm to wild organisms, notably birds, which are valued for aesthetic and educational reasons.

'The acquisition of basic data on pesticides will help alleviate all these problems.'

CORRESPONDENCE

Birds in Crowded Cities - Bombay

In Newsletter 10(10): 10-11 our Editor requests readers staying in crowded cities to send a list of the birds seen in their locality.

I stay in a first floor flat right on Bhulabhai Desai Road (Warden Road), Bombay. There is a bus stop in front of my balcony and our garden has been made so narrow (due to road widening over recent years) that when on the balcony I can almost lend my binoculars to any interested long-armed gentleman sitting on the top deck of a bus. The garden has a narrow border containing shrubs and plants and there are several Hibiscus shrubs at the side of the flats. Warden Road has a constant stream of extremely noisy traffic complete with horns and fumes from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Across the road is a children's playground with a few trees and, beyond it, the sea.

In almost exactly two years I have noted the following 23 birds seen from my balcony:

House Crow, Jungle Crow, Redvented Bulbul, Redwhiskered Bulbul, Magpie Robin, Black Drongo, Tailor Bird, Spotted Munia, Red Munia (undoubtedly an air-cage bird), House Sparrow, Common Swallow, Purplerumped Sunbird, Coppermith, Large Indian Parakeet, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Blossomheaded Parakeet, Common Green Bee-eater, House Swift, Whitebacked Vulture, Pariah Kite, Blue Rock Pigeon (semi-domesticated), Reef Heron, Pond Heron.

A great attraction for the sunbird is a Woodfordia, when in flower. I have never seen a Common Myra from my balcony, which surprises me.

D. A. Starimand

c/o Mercantile Bank Ltd., Bombay 1

Birds in a Coonoor Garden

During these past three days (letter dated 28th Sept.), I have seen no fewer than four 'new' birds in this garden to add to my list.*

On 26.ix I had a clear view of a Blackbacked Pied Flycatcher-Shrike filitting about in the branches above my head. The next day I saw a Southern Tree Pie fly from one tree to another, and the very next minute I saw the little bird who is possibly the source of the Tissip I have frequently heard both here and in Bengal during the winter. I was standing in our rather wild lower garden and the bird was just about ten feet away, busily hunting in the rather bare branches of a small tree. It was a dull olive-brown above, pale buffy white below, with one wing bar and a rather dirty white supercilium, shaped thus: -- ~ --. It must be one of the warblers, but I find them a most confusing family, and even with the help of Birds of Kerala I cannot identify it! It does not quite fit either the Large Crowned Leaf Warbler or Tickell's.

Yesterday afternoon I heard excited sunbird noises but not those I knew, and I rushed out to find two small birds chasing around. They were definitely NOT the Purple- or the Purplerumped, or the Small, all of which I am fairly familiar with. Finally I was able to get a good view of them one at a time in full sun. One was brown above and yellow below, both had long curved bills, and the other was brown above and a much paler brown below, with a brilliant metallic green head and the chin and throat shone metallic maroon purple. I have never seen or heard these birds here before, and I can only think they are Loten's Sunbirds. According to the book, the male is black above, but this bird was definitely brown — a sport perhaps? They are said to live up at heights of 2000 feet at least. Our garden is almost 6000 ft above sea level.

This morning I was so pleased to hear the very familiar voices of our Disergarh Sunbirds, the Purple, and for several hours they have been busy sipping nectar from the hibiscus blooms just outside my room. The male is still in his non-breeding plumage and has a black stripe down his front.

*Some Nilgiri Birds, by Sarah Jameson, Newsletter Vol. 9(11): 5-8; Vol. 9(12): 4-8 -- Ed.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

12-11-68

As though all this were not enough excitement, I have just found two Spotted Munias sitting on a wire in the porch. One had a black speckled belly, but the other was mainly whitish below. I see there are three well-hidden dried grass nests in the jasmine on the porch pillars, so perhaps they will be nesting here.

Sarah Jameson
Culmore, Coonoor

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOL. 10-No. 12-1970 DECEMBER



N O T I C E

The TENTH Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India will be held on Saturday, 16th January, 1971, at the residence of Zafar Futehally, 32-A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58, at 5.00 p.m.

A g e n d a

1. To elect a Chairman
2. To confirm the minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 20th December 1969
3. To receive a report from the Honorary Secretary about the functioning of the Club and of the accounts
4. To receive suggestions from ~~members~~ about activities for the ensuing year
5. To elect the Editorial Board for the Newsletter for Birdwatchers
6. To elect the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Club
7. Any other business with the permission of the Chair

Zafar Futehally
Honorary Secretary
Birdwatchers' Field Club
of India

32-A, Juhu Lane
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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume 10, Number 12

December 1970

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THE RETURN OF THE REDSTART¹

D. A. Stairmand

One of the birds I am most enthusiastic to see in winter in Bombay is the male Redstart (Phoenicurus ochruros) with its black and orange-chestnut coloration and constantly shivering tail.

Whenever I am lucky enough to stay in a place with a good garden I have a fair chance in winter by seeing this charming little bird but unfortunately this is a rarity.

Last winter, however, there were a pair of Redstarts -- at least one was male and the other female - on a stony hillock some way to the left of my company's Beach Shack at Erangel, Marve. That winter I had spent many a happy hour watching one or other of this widely separated pair of Redstarts mounting tiny stones, standing upright and shivering their tails before their bright eyes would spy out a minute insect which was quickly caught and devoured after a few quick little hops. This process was repeated time and again always to my pleasure and the Redstarts, if not the insects. I must admit that I preferred watching the male Redstart on account of his more handsome dress and extreme boldness. As Whistler has pointed out it is extraordinary that this bird which is so shy in its breeding grounds in the high Himalayas in summer in the

¹Readers will recall that in Newsletter Vol. 10(4): 5, April 1970, Mr Stairmand reported the departure of the male Redstart from Erangel by 21.ii.1970, while the female was still around the ruins of an old outpost in the locality -- Ed.

uplands of Kashmir and Ladakh, Tibet, Spiti and Lahul changes its characters completely in winter and becomes one of the most pleasant and friendly of our garden birds. The female Redstart is also a pretty little bird and as with such birds as the Magpie Robin, Indian Robin, Collared and Pied Bushchats I think the females are always prettier with their big innocent eyes, even though the males are undoubtedly more handsome.

One Sunday morning this September I went to the stony hillock at Erangel and sat on a stone quite in the open near a family of Date Palms. This had been a favourite area of the male Redstart up to March and, as luck would have it, I had no sooner sat down than a male Redstart flew towards me and settled on a stone some distance away going about his business in his customary charming style all the while advancing closer to me and fixing a bold bright pale ringed eye on me. This bird was in fresh autumn plumage with the black body plumage largely obscured by grey fringes which will wear off as winter progresses until the bird becomes blacker in appearance. After some time another male Redstart appeared but was quickly driven off. This, perhaps, indicated a fresh arrival from the north and the newcomer will have to find his own territory.

This hillock also contained Desert Wheatears last winter and these are more sober-coloured birds of rather similar habits to the Redstart and certain to provide much joy to any onlooker.

BREVITY AND BIRD NAMES

F. M. Gauntlett

Mr Stairmand's interesting comments in Newsletter 10(11): 6 on my use of bird names raises two very important points. Before I elaborate on these I must declare my wholehearted agreement with Mr Stairmand's sentiments regarding keeping bird names constant, particularly the Latin ones. However, I am also in favour of long term modification where the result avoids an anachronism and is shorter to say and write. After all, language itself becomes modified with usage.

On the length of bird names, many of the labels which our feathered friends are forced to bear were originally attributed by our Victorian or earlier ancestors who considered it a sign of erudition and great scientific knowledge to confer names as long as possible. I give all credit to more modern ornithologists for abbreviating these. Any British birdwatcher who still called a Goldcrest a 'Golden-crested Wren' would be thought a bit of a nut

case and the use of ' Titmouse ' instead of ' Tit ' is distinctly old fashioned (no offence intended, Dr Fleming). I think this is an improvement, not a renegade step.

So far as conformity is concerned, there has been a welcome trend in Britain to try to standardise English names with usage in other English-speaking countries, particularly where rarities are concerned. The British have bowed to their transatlantic friends and ' Yellowshank ' and ' Red-breasted Snipe ' have become ' Yellowlegs ' and ' Dowitcher ' respectively in line with American usage. The ' Buff-backed Heron ' has become ' Cattle Egret ' in line with popular usage elsewhere. These are just a few examples, but the English-speaking birdwatcher is a cosmopolitan, on the standardisation of English names.

On the subject of names for parakeets, I am afraid I remain unrepentant. Whistler used the name Green Parakeet (with no alternative) in his Popular Handbook of Indian Birds, first published in 1928. I do not know if this was a departure from earlier use, but I consider it unfortunate that later authors did not follow suit. Mr Stairmand and I must obviously agree to differ on this point.

Mr Stairmand's choice of the Large Indian Parakeet for comparison was perhaps unfortunate. Why both ' Large ' and ' Indian '? It also comes in an ' Alexandrine ' model. Would not the names ' Large ' and ' Green ' be sufficient to differentiate between the two? As I said before, standardisation of English names has a long way to go but at least these are better than a lot of the so-called Latin names of which we have to learn a new set each time some budding Ph.D. 'revises' a particular group and produces new generic names, only to find that somebody else a few years later has changed half of them back again. This situation is stabilised in Britain by the British Ornithologists' Union which every 10 years or so publishes an official ' British List ', the English and Latin names therein being taken as standard usage.

The question of the name for the vulture unleashes the whole complex problem of species v. subspecies. By ornithological upbringing and inclination I am a ' lumper ', whereas I believe Mr Stairmand may be a ' splitter '.

Europe with its fragmented peninsulas and off-shore islands has in the past been a happy hunting ground for the subspecifier, as has India, particularly with the early Victorian naturalists vying with each other to get as many subspecies as possible named after themselves. Fortunately, nobody has tried to give English names to each of the 35 subspecies of Coal Tit resulting from their efforts.

The culmination of the concept of this era was the publication of the Handbook of British Birds about 30 years ago which had a fully subspecific treatment with an English

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name for each race. The Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan has admittedly used this work as its model, but I think it was unfortunate to use this treatment because it obscures the very real difference in taxonomic value between species and subspecies. A species is a biological entity but a subspecies is not.

Since the war, the trend in Britain, Europe and the U.S. A. has been away from the subspecies concept towards the species for the vast majority of field ornithologists and birdwatchers. As an example, I have seen Crested Tits in Scotland and Switzerland, both considered valid subspecies, yet they both went into my diary as 'Crested Tit' and not, as I gather Mr Stairmand would prefer, as 'Scottish Crested Tit' and 'Central European Crested Tit' respectively. Various wagtails are one of the very few cases of English names being used for subspecies in the field, but these are very distinctive and recognisable as such.

The modern attitude of field ornithology in Europe to species/subspecies can best be summed up by quoting extracts from part of the preface to A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe:

'Subspecies have no definite entity, but merely represent subdivisions within the geographical range of a species. They are races, usually determined by morphological characteristics such as slight differences in measurement, shades, colour, etc. These subdivisions, generally discernible only to expert comparison of museum series, are given for systematic purposes, trinomial labels to denote the generic, specific and racial names. . . . Scientists, of necessity, draw arbitrary lines between them. By comparing specimens of the subspecies from either extreme of the total geographical range quite obvious differences are usually apparent. The changes from one extreme to the other have been brought about by the closely intergrated process of progressive relationship between bird population, environment and climate. . . . For practical purposes therefore, the use of subspecific names in reference to identification in the field is superfluous and altogether undesirable.'

The same source goes on to quote B. W. Tucker, one of the authors of the Handbook of British Birds:

'Subspecies are for the most part much less objective and clear cut in their character than species. . . . This fact has been obscured for the majority of amateur ornithologists by the practice of giving English names to subspecies, such as British Blue Tit, Continental Blue Tit and so on. This practice was justifiable in ornithological systematics at a time when

trinomial nomenclature had not yet gained general recognition . . . but in the long run the results have been unfortunate and the writer has no doubt it should now be discontinued. '

These words originally appeared in ' Subspecies and Field Ornithology ', British Birds 42: 200, written in 1949, and I along with the vast numbers of other birdwatchers wholeheartedly agree with them.

I have dwelt on the British and European situation to assist readers in appreciating the reasons behind my thinking. To revert to the Indian scene, Dr Dillon Ripley appears to agree as any reader of his A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan will see. Each species is introduced with a binomial name accompanied by an English name. The various subspecies follow identified by scientific trinomials only. I think it something of a pity that the new Indian Handbook ignored this system in favour of one which has been superceded in its country of origin for over 20 years.

If Mr Stairmand is still in favour of using English names for each subspecies perhaps he would care to suggest a solution to the following problem, of which the Synopsis and Handbook are replete with examples. Species XYZ is known as race A in the north of the country and race B in the south and a particular line of latitude is taken as the arbitrary dividing line between them. What popular name is the birdwatcher in the transition zone to call it? There must be considerable doubt that it is precisely either A XYZ or B XYZ, so does he call it A/B XYZ? I doubt it. The logical conclusion is to abandon the A and B altogether and call it just XYZ, at least of that much he is sure. If that is all right in one area, why not in the rest of its range? There is a problem in selecting the appropriate name when the two races have different names XYZ and PQR which are not immediately obvious as applying to the same species. I suggest that the English name attributed to the nominate or most widespread race be given preference.

Hence Mr Stairmand should appreciate that my ' Egyptian Vulture ' referred to the species Neophron percnopterus and no particular race. The differences between the races are slight and I do not claim sufficient skill to be able to differentiate between them at long range in the field, nor be so presumptuous as to attribute a name implying that I can.

There are about 8600 bird species in the world which is a manageable number, but to give a name to each subspecies nearly 30,000 have to be found. Some of the specific names are already long enough, e.g. Himalayan Goldenbacked Three-toed Woodpecker, without adding further adjectives or modifications.

So, far from trying to promote a proliferation of new

names, by using those old established and widely held, I was trying to make a small contribution to reducing the number to a concise, standardised minimum.

If the editor's patience will permit a few more words, I would like to express my agreement with Mr Stairmand's feelings on the confusion between brevity and jargon. The ornithological outing may be all right for such oddities as 'Spotted ' shank ' (= Spotted Redshank) and 'L-R-P' (= Little Ringed Plover), there are even worse examples current in the U.K., but not on the printed page, please.

SOME GLEANINGS FROM MY MEMORY

Lavkumar J. Kacher

I have been very careless about keeping on the spot records of all my birdwatching and I certainly regret this big omission. But somehow I just cannot get into the cut and dry attitude of a scientific ornithologist and so years have passed and I have nothing to show!

Today, having nothing very interesting to do, though nothing is more interesting than talking or writing about birds, I have picked up my typewriter and decided to see how much I can put down and how well and interestingly I can manage to do so.

Dwelling far back into my boyhood, and I am amazed at the number of years that have passed watching birds, and then onto the present when memories rather than active watching birds predominate, there is a lot I can write on. I could possibly fill a book if only I can get down to doing it. Here then are a few gleanings from the recesses of my mind.

A Laburnum tree draped in hanging racemes of yellow in a hot summer. All around are densely foliaged mangoes, the sky is blue as they are in Saurashtra for much of the year. I am looking out for new birds for I have just received a Salim Ali as a present (it is the first edition, just out) and I am determined to see all the birds possible. There is a mellow, liquid call. I gaze up into the lovely yellow tree and there against the blue of the sky among the yellow flowers is a male Golden Oriole, my very first.

What has struck me most has been the deep shade and bright dapplings of light in jungle nullahs, so cool and wonderfully attractive in the summer heat. I am sitting on a boulder beside a murmuring brook, and a placid pool is reflecting the beams of sunlight. A white ribbon of paper floats over the water and settles on a twig close by. I hold my breath lest the vision of the apparition should fade. The bird swoops in a big circle and returns to its

perch. I am entranced and gaze on my first male Paradise Flycatcher, an adult in full milky white plumage, glistening black head and long trailing streamers.

I am still a boy. We are on a picnic in winter. I am snoozing in the crotch of a huge banyan tree. There are leaves and figs all around me and also birds. I am part of the old tree and the birds come very close. A robust little bird, the size of a sparrow, but so round and so dumpy and short-tailed, comes to perch on a branch close by. It is green and has its back turned to me. It hops round and I notice brilliant crimson patches on the head and breast and yellow on the face. The Crimsonthroated Barbet I know very well but never at so intimate a range. The bird hops onto a thinner branch and pecks at a fig as red as its forehead.

How large and mysterious the world is to a boy! I am up early one winter morning (winters seemed colder then) and the sun is still down. Mist wreathes over the water; my numb fingers hold my first binoculars. There are strange tchks, churrs, and other sounds emanating from tangles of reeds and vegetation along the water. Suddenly I see a small bird with tail cocked over its back hop out in front of me. It is brown on top, dirty white below, but I am amazed to see a bright blue on its throat. The Blue-throat hops close to me, I stand stock-still and watch it pick insects off the mud, hop around among the vegetation. I move a little to get a further clear view and the little bird flies low and fast, rufous in the tail, to drop into some wet grass further on.

The waterside grass is a livid green, and a small bird with bright yellow head and lower parts and contrasting black back runs and flits over it. Nearby a similar bird but with a marked grey-green back actively hunts for insects. I have the joy of recognizing the two subspecies of the Yellowheaded Wagtail. The sun is so warm, the air so cold!

A clump of rushes grows besides a river pool. The white plumes of its inflorescence droops over the green water, small fish dimple its surface, a little bird more a gem than a live bird sits poised on a bending stalk viewing the water below. The Little Kingfisher has all the colours ranging from fine blues to greens on its back. The breast is rich orange. I have a pair of porcelain kingfishers as book supports. They always bring this moment to mind whenever I set eyes on them.

The summer heat is on. The vegetation is scorched and dust rises before the hot, rasping air. The countryside is tawny brown, the sky overhead a clear blue. I am tired after a morning walk and am thirsty as well and walk briskly back. Rounding a hill slope I suddenly set eyes on a blaze of orange-red, a Flame of the Forest in full bloom.

I stand wonder-struck. The tree is alive with birds. I raise my glasses. What a sight! The flaming flowers on ~~set~~ tiny black stalks. Brilliantly shining male Purple Sunbirds flit, and flutter and posture to one another among the flowers. Their subdued hens in browns and yellow fly around and feed. I had the courage though young to pick a brush and colour the scene. My friends and I regret I never continued painting whenever this work of mine is seen. Fourteen, is when one can become anything really.

I remember also the tiresome demands of many to make me play with others cricket; how dull and boring those moments of forced and unimaginative play were! How happy I am that in their eyes I was a misfit!

OBITUARY

Mrs Usha Ganguli

Readers will be grieved to learn of the sad death of Mrs Usha Ganguli which occurred in Delhi earlier this month (November). As a member of our Editorial Board and a frequent and much appreciated contributor to the Newsletter she will be sorely missed.

For one who started her birdwatching career almost from scratch and comparatively late in life, the proficiency Usha had acquired during the short years was truly remarkable. Even seasoned ornithologists who had the privilege of birding with her were constantly amazed at the unassertive yet confident manner in which she could put a name to almost any unusual or baffling bird, and what is more tell you the clues by which she reached her diagnosis! Her love of birds and dedication to their study and preservation was almost fanatical and contagious, and she had succeeded in 'infecting' quite a band of youthful local enthusiasts. It was an exhilarating experience to be out birdwatching with her in the Delhi neighbourhood, around her beloved Najafgarh jheel (now no more, alas) and Okhla and other places she knew so well. Shortly before she died, Usha had completed the MS. of a book about Delhi birds on which she had been working for several years -- a sort of field guide combined with her own careful records and observations on their status and habits. It is tragic that she did not live to see its publication on which she had so much set her heart, but let us hope that the matter will be duly and vigorously pursued -- that book should stand as a worthy memorial to her, and to her skill, competence and enjoyment of birds. It is regrettable that the Delhi Birdwatching Society which had suffered a serious setback only a few months earlier in the going away on transfer of its energetic and enthusiastic Secretary Peter Jackson, should so soon be bereft of one more, perhaps its

most active and knowledgeable member. The unfailing kindness and hospitality of these two, so much looked forward to and enjoyed by visiting birdwatchers while in Delhi will be remembered with nostalgia.

S.A.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Second International Congress of the World Wildlife Fund held in London on the 17th and 18th November was an impressive and successful occasion in every way. Among the notable participants of the Congress which included several heads of States, were Niel Armstrong, the first man to step on the moon. Thor Heyerdahl of the Kontiki expedition, Jacques Piccard, the famous underwater explorer, and many others who are world famous. One resolution which should please India referred to the statement in the Fourth Plan Document on the need for ecological planning. The resolution expresses the hope that all other developing countries will follow India's lead in this respect. It was evident that the general concern of the Congress was with the environment as a whole, and there was in fact very little reference to Wildlife in specific terms. The audience applauded when Mr E. M. Nicholson, the Chairman of the Resolution Committee referred pointedly to one resolution which did in fact refer to wildlife. It is evident by now that the environment has to be kept healthy not merely for wildlife but for human beings as well. It is also clear that clean air, and clean water is necessary for wild and civilised life alike. The Minister for the Environment, Mr Peter Walker referred to the fact that in the last decade over fifty species of birds had re-appeared in London and this was because the atmosphere was being steadily cleared and improved. Mr Walker emphasised that in future industrial products would have built into them a factor of quietness and cleanliness.

CORRESPONDENCE

Bird problems in the Western Ghats

I found Mrs Jameson's article on Coonoor, Newsletter 10 (11): 11, and her earlier ones, interesting because she appears to have encountered a problem similar to my own in Kodaikanal in March 1970: That many species of the Western Ghats occur up to considerably higher elevations than is generally recognised. The books differ on the precise limits, but on the whole it seems best to consider the

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figures quoted as minima particularly as most are qualified in the manner ' to at least x,000 ft '. As an example, I found both Redvented Bulbuls and Spotted Doves at 6,500 ft, which is considerably more than the usually accepted limits. This phenomenon has prompted me to draft a paper on the subject for submission to the Journal.

Regarding Mrs Jameson's specific problems, I have no doubt that the sunbird was Loten's. I saw this species at Periyar, elevation 3300 ft, and its green gloss (contra the blue gloss of Purple Sunbird) was most distinctive. I also have a strong recollection of watching a sunbird at Kodaikanal which turned out to be ' just an ordinary Purple Sunbird '. Unfortunately, it did not get entered in my diary and I now wish I had done my homework more thoroughly because a Purple Sunbird at this elevation would appear to be news indeed.

Mrs Jameson's second problem was almost certainly a Greenish or Dull Green Leaf Warbler, Phylloscopus trochiloides. The four factors of eyestripe, single wing-bar, colour of upper and lower parts all fit. It is a widespread winter visitor and I found it quite common about Kodaikanal.

It is also the commonest member of its group around Durgapur, W. Bengal, in winter.

Mrs Jameson is not alone in finding this group a difficult one; not even the experts can agree which are species and which are subspecies in some cases. In Britain it is thought to be enough of a problem to sort out only three regular and five vagrant species. In India there are over twenty to consider. A very useful guide is available in Britain covering all the Eurasian members of the group, including all those occurring in India. It is intended primarily for ringers for identifying birds in the hand, but it is useful for field identification also, and from it I have devised a key which works quite well. A version of it is being submitted to the editor for a future Newsletter as other readers may be able to benefit from it.

F. M. Gauntlett

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